

आधुनिक भारत के निर्माता
BUILDERS OF MODERN INDIA

SRI AUROBINDO

आधुनिक भारत के निर्माता

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M.P. PANDIT

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नव-भारत के निर्माता

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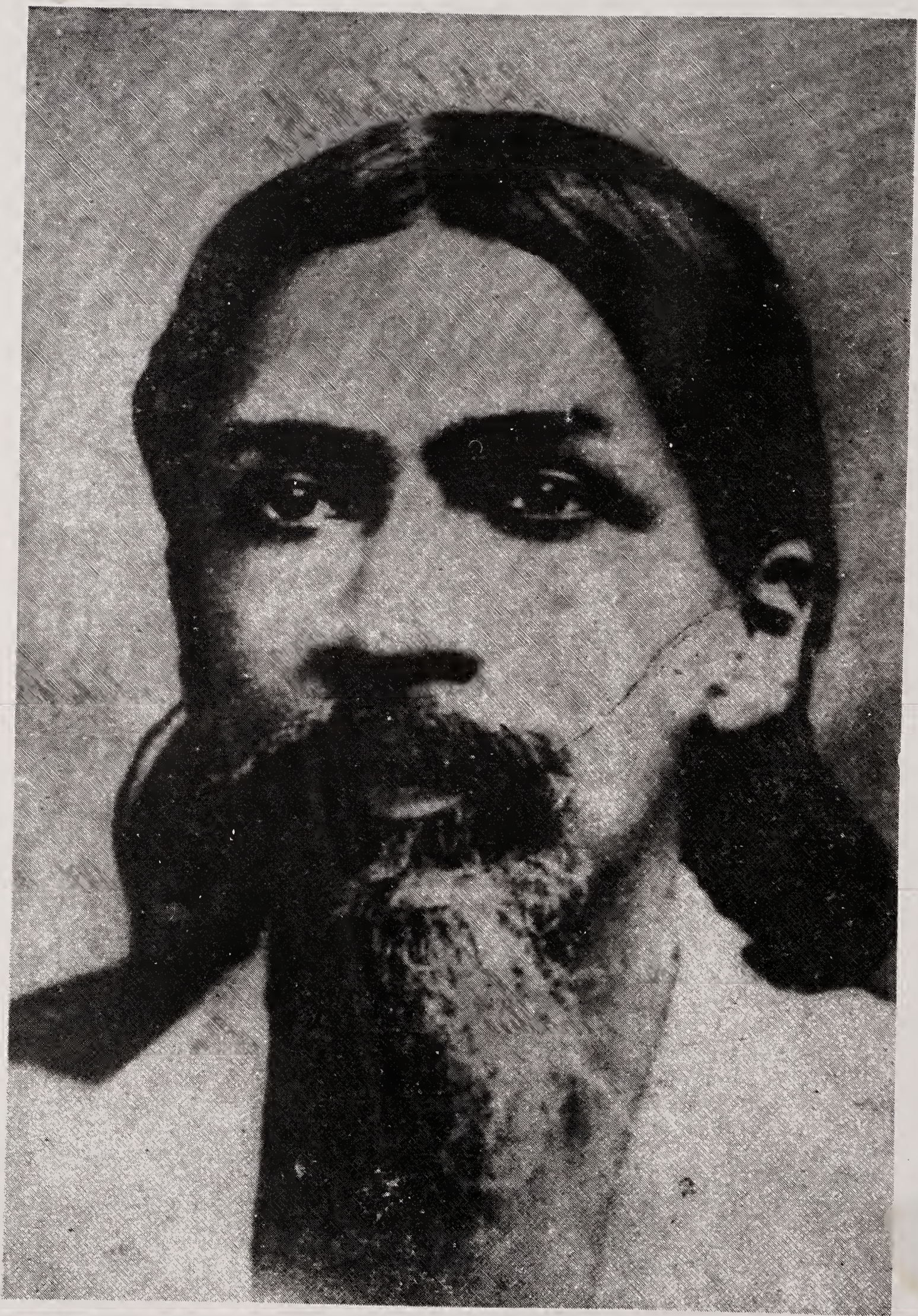
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SRI AUROBINDO

M.P. Pandit



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About the Series

The object of this series is to record for the present and future generations, the story of the struggles and achievements of those eminent sons and daughters of India who have been mainly instrumental for our national renaissance and the attainment of Independence, Except in a few cases, such authoritative biographies have not been available.

The biographies are planned as handy volumes written by knowledgeable persons and giving a brief account, in simple words, of the lives and activities of the eminent leaders and of their times. They are not intended either to be comprehensive studies or to replace the more elaborate biographies.

The work of writing these lives has to be entrusted to different persons. It has, therefore, not been possible to publish the biographies in a chronological order. It is hoped, however, that within a short period all eminent personalities will figure in this series.

Sri R. R. Diwakar is the General Editor of the series.

Preface

My first contact with Sri Aurobindo took place in a strange way. I was thirteen. One afternoon I was idly browsing among books in the office-cum-library of my brother who was an advocate. The dusty bookshelves were full of old leather bound volumes of All-India Law Reports. Among them was a big green book which excited my curiosity. I pulled it out and found it was entitled. "Alipore Bomb Case". I opened it and my eyes fell on a photograph with the words ARAVINDA GHOSE beneath. The name acted on me like a *mantra* and I found myself repeating it with obvious delight. It was something sweet and melodious. Later I spoke to my brother of this experience. He wrote about it to my mentor Sri Kapali Sastry who told me that the meaning of my finding the photograph in the book would become evident as I grew up. And so it did.

For soon my childhood impulses towards God grew into a hunger and I devoured the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna*, the works of Swami Vivekananda and so on. I asked Sri Kapali Sastry whether I could go to Pondicherry and join him there. He was definite that I should continue my education and prepare myself for the Quest in the meanwhile. By that time the *Bases of Yoga* by Sri Aurobindo had been published. It was a beautiful bound volume costing only three rupees and it became my companion.

Within a couple of years, in 1937, I had my first Darshan of Sri Aurobindo on August 15. It was overwhelming and I felt the only thing comparable to him was the Himalayas. I still remember the slight smile on his face moulded of compassion.

Then in April 1939, on the eve of my coming away to the ashram, I had a curious desire to travel by plane from Bombay to Poona as I thought that once I joined the ashram I would not leave it and there would be no opportunity to travel by air thereafter. So I wrote to

Pondicherry and Sri Aurobindo wrote in pencil, 'He can fly'. That was his first communication to me and it thrilled me to the core. I mattered to him, didn't I?

The next occasion was some time in 1947 when I wrote my first article. It was on meditation and it was being read out to him, he remarked that he had heard it before. Nirodbaran who was reading it assured him that it was the first time that it had come up. But Sri Aurobindo insisted that he had heard every word of it. When I learnt of it, I felt so humble.

Yet another time, I had written a reply to Adhar Chandra Das's criticism of a book by Sri Aurobindo in the *Calcutta Review*. Ongoing through it, Sri Aurobindo added a line : *The physical mind also thinks*.

It opened a vista for me.

I mention these few incidents as outer tokens of a relation that developed steadily and was made possible by the solicitude and grace of both Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. My being was completely taken over by his Personality whose diverse aspects appealed to me more than his Philosophy which took time to enter and reshape my mind.

He was so human. Once when his sister and other members of the household complained to him bitterly about the bad behaviour of the cook, he called him aside and said, in his usual impersonal tone. "It seems you are behaving rudely, do not do so." We do not know what the others felt; we only know that the culprit went away smiling.

He was so full of wit. When a British author wrote that Sri Aurobindo was a man who never smiles, Sri Aurobindo added, "but who always jokes."

He was so simple. When the ashram was formed and the mother took to him a list of things required for each Sadhaka, he was surprised and said that a *sadhaka* needs nothing more than a mat, a *kuja* and a thing or two that way. He did not understand why furniture like table, chair, cot, almirah was necessary. For he himself had all along managed in Pondicherry with the bare minimum. There was, for instance, just one towel among seven inmates of the house. Each one would use the towel after bath and hang it on the clothesline to dry. Sri Aurobindo would be the last to use it.

He was so undemanding. He would never ask anything for himself. During the *Arya* days he would be waiting for tea in the afternoons before starting typing for the Journal. One day the person incharge fell asleep and the tea failed to come up. Sri Aurobindo sat quietly waiting and did not call for it. Before his eyes came the figure of 4 in a golden hue. And precisely at 4 p.m. the apologetic attendant appeared with the tea.

He was so unprepossessing. He moved with all people as with equals. He frowned upon sadhakas scolding others and defended the right of every person to follow his nature.

He was so humble. He would learn from anyone, from anywhere. One day he was sitting in the Guest House verandah upstairs, in serious contemplation—obviously he had a problem. A familiar figure, Kulla Swami, as he was known, (a short non-descript ascetic with a none-too-good reputation) was passing by in the street below. Suddenly he turned, came up to where Sri Aurobindo was sitting, lifted a tea cup which was on the table, turned it upside down, put it right and was gone. Later Sri Aurobindo remarked that his difficulty had been solved : the cup has to be emptied before it is filled anew. No wonder the Mother once said that the only humble man she had met in her life was Sri Aurobindo.

It is this human side of Sri Aurobindo that I have attempted to present in these pages. Naturally in a multiple person like him, every aspect enters into every other and a plethora of radiant personalities comes up before our eye when we think of him. However, as of now, let us meet Sri Aurobindo the Man.

6-8-1983

M.P. PANDIT
SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM
PONDICHERRY.

Preface to the Second Edition

The biography of an eminent architect of India—Sri Aurobindo, meets at once the aspirations of the present and the future generations and also the needs of posterity. It is heartening to learn of the response of readers and seekers both from within and outside the country, necessitating the issue of a second edition.

Let the Message of the Prophet of Life Divine spread all around.

24-11-1987

M. P. PANDIT
SRI AUROBINDO ASHRAM
PONDICHERRY

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Introductory

(1872-1879)

Five Dreams

AUGUST 15, 1947 is the birthday of free India. It marks for her the end of an old era, the beginning of a new age. But it has a significance not only for us, but for Asia and the whole world; for it signifies the entry into the comity of nations of a new power with untold potentialities which has a great part to play in determining the political, social, cultural and spiritual future of humanity. To me personally it must naturally be gratifying that this date which was notable only for me because it was my own birthday celebrated annually by those who have accepted my gospel of life, should have acquired this vast significance. As a mystic, I take this identification, not as a coincidence or fortuitous accident, but as a sanction and seal of the Divine Power which guides my steps on the work with which I began life. Indeed almost all the world movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though at that time they looked like impossible dreams, I can observe on this day either approaching fruition or initiated and on the way to their achievement.

I have been asked for a message on this great occasion, but I am perhaps hardly in a position to give one. All I can do is to make a personal declaration of the aims and ideals conceived in my childhood and youth and now watched in their beginning of fulfilment, because they are relevant to the freedom of India, since they are a part of what I believe to be India's future work, something in which she cannot but take a leading position. For I have always held and said that India was arising, not to serve her own material interests only, to achieve expansion greatness, power and prosperity—though these too she must not neglect,—and certainly not like others to acquire domination of other peoples, but to live also for God and the world as a helper and leader of the whole human race. Those aims and ideals were in their natural order, i.e. : a revolution which would achieve India's freedom and her unity, the resurgence and liberation of Asia and her return to the great role

which she had played in the progress of human civilisation; the rise of a new, a greater, brighter and nobler life for mankind which for its entire realisation would rest outwardly on an international unification of the separate existence of the peoples, preserving and securing their national life but drawing them together into an overriding and consummating oneness; the gift by India of her spiritual knowledge and her means for the spiritualisation of life to the whole race. Finally, a new step in the evolution which, by uplifting the consciousness to a higher level, would begin the solution of the many problems of existence which have perplexed and vexed humanity, since men began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society.

India is free but she has not achieved unity, only a fissured and broken freedom. At one time it almost seemed as if she might relapse into the chaos of separate States which preceded the British conquest. Fortunately there has now developed a strong possibility that this disastrous relapse will be avoided. The wisely drastic policy of the Constituent Assembly makes it possible that the problem of the depressed classes will be solved without schism or fissure. But the old communal division into Hindu and Muslim seems to have hardened into the figure of a permanent political division of the country. It is to be hoped that the Congress and the nation will not accept the settled fact as for ever settled or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled; civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. The partition of the country must go, it is to be hoped by a slackening of tension, by a progressive understanding of the need of peace and concord, by the constant necessity of common and concerted action, even of an instrument of union for that purpose. In this way unity may come about under whatever form—the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, the division must and will go. For without it the destiny of India might be seriously impaired and even frustrated. But that must not be.

Asia has arisen and large parts of it have been liberated or are at this moment being liberated; its other still subject parts are moving through whatever struggles towards freedom. Only a little has to be done and that will be done today or tomorrow. There India has her part to play and has begun to play it with an energy and ability which already indicates the measure of her possibilities and the place she can

take in the council of the nations.

The unification of mankind is under way, though only in an imperfect initiative, organised but struggling against tremendous difficulties. But the momentum is there and, if the experience of history can be taken as a guide, it must inevitably increase until it conquers. Here too India has begun to play a prominent part and, if she can develop that larger statesmanship which is not limited by the present facts and immediate possibilities but looks into the future and brings it nearer, her presence may make all the difference between a slow and timid and a bold and swift development. A catastrophe may intervene and interrupt or destroy what is being done, but even then the final result is sure. For in any case the unification is a necessity in the course of Nature, an inevitable movement and its achievement can be safely foretold. Its necessity for the nations also is clear, for without it the freedom of the small peoples can never be safe hereafter and even large and powerful nations cannot really be secure. India, if she remains divided, will not herself be sure of her safety. It is therefore to the interest of all that union should take place. Only human imbecility and stupid selfishness could prevent it. Against that, it has been said, even the gods strive in vain; but it cannot stand for ever against the necessity of things and the Divine Will. Nationalism will then have fulfilled itself; and the national spirit and outlook must grow up and international forms and institutions; even it may be such developments as dual or multilateral citizenship and a voluntary fusion of cultures may appear in the process of the change and the spirit of nationalism losing its militancy may find these things perfectly compatible with the integrity of its own outlook. A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race.

The spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the disasters of the time and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is ever an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice.

The rest is still a personal hope and an idea and ideal which has begun to take hold both in India and in the West on forward-looking minds. The difficulties in the way are more formidable than in any other field of endeavour, but difficulties were made to be overcome and if the Supreme Will is there, they will be overcome. Here too, if this

evolution is to take place, since it must come through a growth of the spirit and the inner consciousness, the initiative can come from India and although the scope must be universal, the central movement may be hers.

Such is the content which I put into this date of India's liberation; whether or how far or how soon this connection will be fulfilled, depends upon this new and free India.

Sri Aurobindo¹

1. For footnotes kindly see Works of Reference given from page 299 onwards.

The Dreamer

IT IS RARE to come across one who lives to see his early dreams nearing fulfilment in his life-time. Sri Aurobindo is unique in this respect, especially when we see that his 'dreams' are not of an individual nature but of cosmic significance. And who is Sri Aurobindo?

It is difficult to answer that question. For Sri Aurobindo is a scholar, poet, revolutionary, thinker, seer, philosopher, yogi, creator of an age. He is, above all, a Rishi, one who sees beyond, *kranta darsi*, one who has realised his identity with the Divine and wields His creative Bow. The *Sri* in his name is no mere courtesy title like Mister. In the pristine tradition of India, *Sri* means Glory, Glory of the Divine. The term is prefixed to the name of one who has been vouchsafed this Glory.

Sri came to be used at a particular stage in his life when his consciousness underwent a revolutionary change. But of that later on. Suffice it to say that this name was the culmination of a series of imperceptible changes in his appellations.

He was named Aravinda (lotus)–Aurobindo in Bengali pronunciation, Speaking of the choice of the name, Sri Aurobindo was to observe later :

“Look at the irony of human decisions and human hopes. My father who wanted all his sons to be great men—and succeeded in a small way with three of them—in a sudden inspiration gave me the name Aurobindo, till then not borne by any one in India or the wide world, that I might stand out unique among the great by the unique glory of my name. And now when I went to the National College in the Swadeshi days which was my first public step towards the ignominies of fame there was already an Aurobindo Prakash waiting for me there with the sardonic comment of the gods printed on his learned forehead. Aurobindo Prakash, indeed!”²

The full name given at the time of christening, however, was Aravinda Ackroyd Ghose. This name was continued till he left England after the completion of his studies. Thereafter he was Arabinda Ghose till he withdrew from politics. During the earlier period of his retirement and spiritual askesis he was simply A.G. though he would sign, 'Kali' in some correspondence, Kali signifying Shakti, (Power) of Sri Krishna. After November 24, 1926—the day of his *Siddhi*, realisation of the Krishna Consciousness in the physical—he came to be known as Sri Aurobindo.

Ancestry

THE GHOSSES OF Bengal are reputed to come from the warrior-classes of Punjab. And Sri Aurobindo's father, Dr. Krishna Dhan Ghose, was a Ghose indeed, holding his head up under all conditions of adversity or injustice. Coming from a distinguished family, he was born around 1845 in Konnagar, eleven miles from Calcutta. He completed his school education by 1858 and went in for medicine. In the fourth year of his studies in the Medical College, he married Swarnalata, daughter of Raj Narayan Bose and in 1869 went to England where he obtained his M.D. at the Aberdeen University. On return he joined service with the Government of Bengal and rose to be a District Civil Surgeon, efficient and upright. He won the hearts of the people whom he served and became highly popular though he had little patience with outdated social conventions and religious taboos. In fact, on his return from abroad, he indignantly refused to undergo the *prayaschitta* (repentance) ceremony obligatory during those times on those who had crossed the oceans. Sri Aurobindo observes of him: "Everyone makes the fore-fathers of a great man very religious-minded, pious etc. It is not true in my case at any rate. My father was a tremendous atheist."³

He took a leading part in civic life and was responsible for many ameliorations and projects of benefit to the public. He was generous to a fault and his bounties were legendary. As a tribute in the *Karmayogin* records "Keen of intellect, tender of heart, impulsive and generous almost to recklessness, regardless of his own wants but sensitive to the sufferings of others—this was the inventory of the character of Dr. Krishna Dhan Ghose."⁴

Though he was not in any way interested in politics, events drove him into it. Sri Aurobindo reminisces: "My father was extremely popular at Khulna. Wherever he went he became a power. When he was at Rangpur he was friendly with the English magistrate. We went and

stayed with his cousin Mr. Drewett in England afterwards. It was always the 'doctor' who got things done at Rangpur. When the new magistrate came he found that nothing could be done without Dr. K. D. Ghose. So he asked the Government to remove him and he was transferred to Khulna. It was from that time that he became a politician. That is to say, he did not like English domination. Before that everything western was good. He wanted for example, all his sons to be great and at that time to join the I.C.S. was to become great. He was extremely generous. Hardly anyone who went to him for help came back empty handed."⁵

His wife Swarnalata was a gracious lady and was known as the 'Rose of Rangpur'. She was educated and had literary tastes. No wonder, because she was the daughter of Rishi Raj Narayan Bose who was a leader of the Brahmo Samaj, a fine synthesis of the thought-currents of Vedanta, Islam and Western thought. He was a staunch upholder of Indian values and is remembered as the grandfather of Indian Nationalism. On his passing in 1899, his grandson Sri Aurobindo was moved to write a sonnet, *Transiit, non Periiit*:

Not in annihilation lost, nor given
 To darkness art thou fled from us and light,
 O strong and sentient spirit; no mere heaven
 Of ancient joys, no silence eremite
 Received thee; but the omnipresent Thought
 Of which thou wast a part and earthly hour,
 Took back its gifts. Into that splendour caught
 Thou hast not lost thy special brightness, Power
 Remains with thee and the old genial force."⁶

Childhood

SRI AUROBINDO WAS born at 4.52 a.m. in the brahmamuhurta, Hour of God on August 15, 1872, in Calcutta. He was the third of the sons of Dr. Krishna Dhan Ghose and Swarnalata.

On the occasion of the naming seremony, it appears an English lady, Miss Annette Ackroyd, was present and with his usual fondness for the English, Dr. Ghose added her family names as the second name to the child's first, Aravinda. Thus the full name Aravinda Ackroyd Ghose.

Dr. Ghose had been an ardent admirer of the West and western values; what is more, he had developed an aversion, almost an antagonism to everything Indian. No wonder he had an English nurse, Miss Pagett, to look after the children. They learnt to talk in English with her and in broken Hindustani with the butler who was the other person around. Aurobindo did not know Bengali during those first five years.

When he was five, he was sent—alongwith his two brothers, Benoy Bhushan and Manomohan—to Loretto Convent School at Darjeeling where most of the children were English and the teachers were Irish nuns. They were all lodged in a long dormitory. During vacations, the brothers used to spend some time with their parents and some at their grandfather Raj Narayan's at Deoghar.

A few incidents of those days may be mentioned. Jogendra, the eldest maternal uncle, once held up a mirror to Aurobindo and said, "Look, there is a monkey." The child took the mirror, held it up to his uncle and exclaimed, "Great uncle, great monkey (bodo mama, bodo bandor)!"

One evening all the boys had gone for a walk with their grandfather, Raj Narayan. After sometime, they realised that he was missing.

They walked back only to find that grand'pa was sleeping in a standing position!

More important was a dream that Aurobindo had during this period. As he recounted it later: "I was lying down one day when I saw suddenly a great darkness rushing into me and enveloping me and the whole universe. After that I had a great *tamas*—darkness—always hanging on to me all through my stay in England. I believe that darkness had something to do with the *tamas* that came upon me. It left me only when I was coming back to India.⁷

Education

ENGLAND (1879–1893)

Manchester (1879-1884)

AUROBINDO WAS HARDLY seven, when he was taken to England along with his brothers, Benoy Bhushan and Manomohan, by Dr. Ghose and his wife in 1879. The children were entrusted to the care of Rev. Drewett and Mrs. Drewett in Manchester. Mr. Drewett was a cousin of Magistrate Glazier at Rangpur whom Dr. Ghose knew well. The doctor left strict instructions with the Drewetts that the wards “should not be allowed to make the acquaintance of any Indian or undergo any Indian influence.”¹

The two elder brothers were enrolled in the Manchester Grammar School, but Aurobindo was looked after at home by the Drewetts. Mr. Drewett gave Aurobindo a solid grounding in Latin (in which he himself was specially proficient) and taught him English, History etc. Mrs. Drewett coached him in Geography, Arithmetic and French. Aurobindo acquired a taste for English literature and read on his own Shakespeare, Keats, Shelley and the Bible. He even wrote a verse for the Fox family magazine.

Once during this period, it appears a meeting of non-Conformist ministers was held at Cumberland and Mrs. Drewett’s old mother took young Aurobindo there. Sri Aurobindo describes the scene :

“After the prayers were over nearly all dispersed, but devout people remained a little longer and it was at that time that conversions were made. I was feeling completely bored. Then a minister approached me and asked me some questions. I did not give any reply. Then they all shouted. ‘He is saved, he is saved’, and began to pray for me and offer thanks to God. I did not know what it was all about. Then the minister came to me and asked me to pray. I was not in the habit of praying. But somehow I did it in the manner in which children recite their prayers before going to sleep in order to keep up an-appearance. I was about ten at that time.”²

There is an arresting photograph of Aurobindo at this time. The Mother's* observations on it are worth noting : "...the spontaneity and freshness of the nature and some thing candid with which he came into this world. His inner being was on the surface. He knew nothing of this world."³

Rev. Drewett resigned from his pastoral charge due to some differences with the deacons in 1881 and by 1884 he had migrated to Australia leaving the three Ghose brothers in charge of his mother. The old lady moved to London and took lodgings for them in 1884.

* The Mother, who became the radiant collaborator with Sri Aurobindo in his spiritual mission.

St. Paul's London (1884-1890)

AUROBINDO WAS ADMITTED to St. Paul's School in September 1884 and remained there till December 1889. Dr. Walker, the headmaster of the school was very favourably impressed by Aurobindo's knowledge of Latin and his general capacities and took personal interest in grounding him in Greek. He pushed the boy rapidly into the higher classes.

An incident took place at this time which relieved the boys of the religious ministrations of old Mrs. Drewett. She would have passages from the Bible read out every day during the prayer time and Benoy Bhushan usually led the worship. One day, however, Manomohan was in a funny mood and went on to say that Moses got it right when his people disobeyed him. The lady got highly offended and refused to live any more with such atheists. And she left. After that Benoy Bhushan and Aurobindo moved to another residence and Manomohan went into lodgings.

This was a time of much suffering and poverty. For remittances from his father in India had become more and more irregular. During the earlier years, Dr. Ghose had been regularly sending £ 360 per year. But as his expenditure, domestic and public, increased, he became more and more careless about the maintenance of the children in England. "During this period Aurobindo used to get a slice or two of bread and butter and a cup of tea in the morning and in the evening only a penny saveloy (a kind of sausage). For nearly two years he had to go practically without dinner at that young age. He had no overcoat to protect him from the rigours of the London winter and there was no heating arrangement in the office where he slept, nor had he a proper bedroom."⁴

Aurobindo studied for five years at St. Paul's and distinguished himself for his mastery of the classics and proficiency in literature and

history. He was a member of the Literary Society of the school. He once spoke on the Inconsistency of Swift's Political Opinions and another time on Milton. He had deep literary interests which at times took precedence over his regular studies. One of his favourites was Shelley's *Revolt of Islam*. He recalls :

“*The Revolt of Islam* was a great favourite with me even when I was quite young and I used to read it again and again, of course, without understanding everything. But evidently it appealed to some part of the being. There was no other effect of reading it except this that I had a thought that I would dedicate my life to a similar world-change and take part in it.”⁵

He did extensive general reading and took special interest in English poetry, literature and fiction, French literature and the history of medieval and modern Europe. He also learnt Italian, some German and Spanish. He won a number of prizes, including the Butterworth prize for Literature and Bedford prize for History, and secured an open scholarship to King's College.

Aurobindo had begun writing poetry at a very early age. Even while at Manchester he wrote a poem for the *Fox's Weekly*, ‘an awful imitation’ as he would refer to it. That his brother Manomohan was a gifted poet and a classmate of Laurence Binyon and a friend of Oscar Wilde was certainly a factor in promoting Aurobindo's interest in writing poetry. Reading Aurobindo's translation of a passage in Greek from ‘Hecuba’, done at the age of seventeen, Laurence Binyon is said to have asked him why he was not writing more poetry. He would also write Latin and Greek verses.

In his final year at St. Paul's Aurobindo applied for and appeared for an I.C.S. (Indian Civil Service) test and stood high, with notable score in Greek and Latin. He got a stipend for the probationary period of the I.C.S.

Cambridge (1890-1892)

HAVING WON AN open scholarship for classics at the King's College, Cambridge and also having qualified for a stipend as an I.C.S. probationer, Aurobindo took on both studies in classics at the college and preparation for the I.C.S. It must have been a strenuous time considering the financial stress he was undergoing. Despite the scholarship and the stipend, the brothers never had enough. A letter from G.W. Prothero his senior tutor (to James Cotton in 1892) throws, significant light on the situation :

“He performed his part of the bargain, as regards the College, most honourably, and took a high place in the 1st class of the Classical Tripos at the end of the second year of his residence. He also obtained certain college prizes, showing command of English and literary ability. That a man should have been able to do this (which alone is quite enough for most undergraduates) and at the same time to keep up his I.C.S. work, proves very unusual industry and capacity. Besides his classical scholarship he possessed a knowledge of English literature far beyond the average of undergraduates and wrote a much better English style than most young Englishmen.

“The man has not only ability but character. He has had a very hard and anxious time of it for the last two years. Supplies from home have almost entirely failed, and he has had to keep his two brothers as well as himself, and yet his courage and perseverance have never failed. I have several times written to his father on his behalf, but for the most part unsuccessfully. It is only latterly that I managed to extract from him enough to pay some tradesmen who would otherwise have put his son into the County Court. I am sure these pecuniary difficulties were not due to any extravagance on Ghose's part: his whole way of life which was simple and penurious in the extreme, is against this: they were due entirely to circumstances beyond his control.”⁶

With all the hardships the brothers seem to have maintained their cheer and happy relations with their father. Look at the letter of Aurobindo to Dr. Ghose regarding Oscar Browning, for instance :

“Last night I was invited to coffee with one of the Dons and in his rooms I met the great O.B., otherwise Oscar Browning, who is the feature par excellence of King’s. He was extremely flattering, passing from the subject of cotillions to that of scholarships he said to me, ‘I suppose you know you passed an extraordinarily high examination. I have examined papers at thirteen examinations and I have never during that time seen such excellent papers as yours (meaning my Classical papers, at the scholarship examination). As for your essay, it was wonderful.’ In this essay (a comparison between Shakespeare and Milton), I indulged in my Oriental tastes to the top of their bent; it overflowed with rich and tropical imagery; it abounded in antitheses and epigrams and it expressed my real feelings without restraint or reservation. I thought myself that it was the best thing I have ever done but at school it would have been condemned as extraordinarily Asiatic and bombastic. The great O.B. afterwards asked me where my rooms were and when I had answered he said, ‘That wretched hole!’ then turning to Mahaffy, ‘How rude we are to our scholars ! We get great minds to come down here and then shut them in that box! I suppose it is to keep their pride down.’”⁷

The father was no less happy with Aurobindo. In a letter to his brother-in-law, Jogendra Bose, he writes :

“The three sons I have produced, I have made giants of them. I may not, but you will live to be proud of three nephews who will adorn your country and shed lustre to your name...Ara, I hope, will yet glorify his country by brilliant administration. I shall not live to see it, but remember this letter if you do...(He is at King’s College, Cambridge, now, borne there by his own ability.)”⁸

Aurobindo, however, did not graduate at Cambridge. “He passed high in the First Part of the Tripos (first class); it is on passing this First Part that the degree of B.A. is usually given; but as he had only two years at his disposal, he had to pass it in his second year at Cambridge and the First Part gives the degree only if it is taken in the third year; if one takes it in the second year one has to appear for the Second Part of the Tripos in the fourth year to qualify for the degree. He might have got

the degree if he had made an application for it, but he did not care to do so. A degree in English is valuable only if one wants to take up an academic career.”⁹

It was in 1891 when Parnell, the Irish leader, died that Aurobindo wrote a poem on him :

Charles Stewart Parnell
 O pale and guiding light, now star unsphered,
 Deliverer lately hailed, since by our lords
 Most feared, most hated, hated because feared,
 Who smot’st them with an edge surpassing swords!
 Thou too wert then a child of tragic earth,
 Since vainly filled thy huminous doom of birth.¹⁰

Writing poetry seems to have been a major interest with him during these years. Soon after his Tripos, Aurobindo won a prize for Greek iambics and also one for Latin hexameters. He was to discover later the true quantitative hexameter in English. The clue to it was given by his friend at Cambridge, Norman Ferrers (who later practised as a Barrister in the Straits of Malaya). Sri Aurobindo recalls : “It was he who gave me the clue to the hexameter verse in English. He read out a line from Homer which he thought was the best line and that gave me the swing of the metre. There is really no successful hexameter in English. Matthew Arnold and his friends have attempted it but they have failed.”¹¹

Equally interesting are the remarks of an Englishman, a fellow-scholar of Aurobindo :

“He was a very able Classical Scholar, easily first in this subject in the Entrance Scholarship Examination, and probably only the fact that, to satisfy the regulations of the Indian Civil Service, he had to take the University Tripos after two years (instead of the usual three) prevented him from being in the top division of the first Class in the final test...With regard to his life at Cambridge a complete lack of interest in games must have lessened his enjoyment of the life of the place. His interest were in literature : among Greek Poets for instance he once waxed enthusiastic over Sappho, and he had a nice feeling of English style. Yet for England itself he seemed to have small affection; it was not only the climate that he found trying : as an example, he became quite indignant when on one occasion I called England the modern Athens. This title,

he declared, belonged to France; England much more resembled Corinth, a commercial state and therefore unattractive to him. I only hope that his views of the English race are more charitable now than they were in the 'nineties'." ¹²

It may be mentioned, relevantly here, that Sri Aurobindo was opposed to the imperialism of the British ruling classes and had no prejudice of any sort against the English race. He referred in later years to the 'constitutional mind' of the English whom he called 'a decent people'. He once observed : "England is comparatively less corrupt. The English are the only people who know how to work the Parliamentary System. Parliamentary Government is in their blood." ¹³

Interest in Politics

WHEN HE WAS hardly eleven, Aurobindo had already received strongly the impression that a period of general upheaval and great revolutionary changes was coming in the world and he himself was destined to play a part in it. His attention was now drawn to India and this feeling was soon canalised into the idea of the liberation of his own country.¹⁴

Though his father, Dr. K. D. Ghose, had been originally a whole-hearted admirer of the English people and their ways of life, he had slowly begun to react to their colonial style of functioning in India. Now he went a step further and “began sending the newspaper, *The Bengalee* with passages marked relating cases of maltreatment of Indians by Englishmen and he wrote in his letters denouncing the British Government in India as a heartless Government.”¹⁵

The strong feeling that young Aurobindo had at the age of eleven developed into a firm decision towards the end of another four years. And it was with this decision to work for the liberation of his mother-country that he went to Cambridge where there was already a forum waiting for him viz. Indian Majlis, a body of Indian students interested in Indian affairs. Among his colleagues at Cambridge were Hari Singh Gour, K. G. Deshpande, Francis Xavier De Souza, Pereira, Beachcroft (who was later as a judge to try him in a political case). Aurobindo became, for a time, secretary to the Majlis and participated in its debates. His speeches were fiery in their condemnation of the British imperialism in India and breathed revolution.

There were other young Indian students like the Ghose brothers who were dissatisfied with the moderate tone and policies of men like Dadabhai Naoroji who were leading the protest in their own way. They aimed at direction, thought in terms of violent revolution. Many of these met in London and formed a group, a secret society with a romantic

name, 'Lotus and Dagger'. This was perhaps the first collective effort of its kind in England in the cause of India's freedom. Everyone of its members took a solemn pledge to adopt some line of action which would help to drive out the foreign ruler from the Indian soil. But the society never got off, it was still-born, though some of the more serious participants like Aurobindo kept their pledge and worked for its fulfilment later in their life. Aurobindo joined this group just after he had left Cambridge; he did not form it.

Aurobindo had had no opportunity to learn his mother tongue, Bengali in India. He had known English and Hindustani. He started learning the language from Mr. Towers. Sri Aurobindo recalled he was known as 'Pandit Towers'. Purani writes : "His knowledge of Bengali was limited to the works of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and other early writers of Sanskritised prose. He knew the *Bodhodaya* and other elementary works. Once Aurobindo took a passage of Bankim Chandra to him. After reading it carefully, 'Pandit Towers' turned round and said, 'But this is not Bengali!'"¹⁶

Giving a few other humorous incidents in Aurobindo's Cambridge life, the same biographer continues : "In the Majlis there was enough room for humour. The question of independence of the subjected nations was once being discussed. One undergraduate spoke eloquently and, citing the example of Egypt, repeated two or three times during his speech : 'The Egyptians rose up like a man'. When he said this for the third time, somebody from the audience demanded, 'But how many times did they sit down?'"¹⁷

And then a reminiscence by Sri Aurobindo himself :

"Well, a Punjabi, student at Cambridge once took our breath away by the frankness and comprehensive profundity of his affirmation: 'Liars! But we are all liars!' It appeared that he had intended to say 'lawyers', but his pronunciation gave his remark a deep force of philosophical observation and generalisation which he had not intended! But it seems to be the last word on human nature'"¹⁸

Spiritual Awakenings

AUROBINDO HAD NO particular interest in matters of religion. Not that he was an atheist; perhaps it would be more true to say he was an agnostic. Prof. R.S. Lepper, an undergraduate with Aurobindo at King's College, writes: "He was also, I think, suffering from a sort of religious or spiritual nausea, due apparently to long continued overdoses of a narrow type of Christianity inflicted on him, doubtless with excellent intentions, by some probably devout ladies, into whose care, I believe, he had been committed when a young boy at school in London. The effect of this dosing was naturally to make him a confirmed pantheist, with a quite understandable dislike of Christian Missionaries."¹⁹

May be he was not religious in the usual sense of the term. But the young boy was highly sensitive. He records how at the age of thirteen he became conscious that he was selfish and he felt from deep within that he should give up selfishness. And this he did to the letter during his entire life-time.

He reacted strongly against injustice and cruelty. He explains: "The feeling was more abhorrence than pain; from early childhood there was a strong hatred and disgust for all kinds of cruelty and oppression."²⁰

He notes: "Sri Aurobindo's first turn towards spiritual seeking came in England in the last year of his stay there. He had lived in the family of a Non-conformist clergyman, minister of a chapel belonging to the 'Congregational' denomination; though he never became a Christian this was the only religion and the Bible the only scripture with which he was acquainted in his childhood; but in the form in which it presented itself to him, it repelled rather than attracted him and the narrowness and intolerance even of its later developments disgusted him so strongly that he drew back from religion altogether. After a short period of complete atheism, he accepted the Agnostic attitude. In his studies for the I.C.S., however, he came across a brief and very scanty statement

of the 'six philosophies' of India and he was especially struck by the concept of the *Atman* in the *Adwaita*. It was borne in upon his mind that here might be a true clue to the reality behind life and the world. He made a strong and very crude mental attempt to realise what this Self or *Atman* might be, to convert the abstract idea into a concrete and living reality in his own consciousness, but conceiving it as something beyond or behind this material world; not having understood it as something immanent in himself and all and also universal.'²¹

The Riding Test

AUROBINDO HAD QUALIFIED himself for the Indian Civil Service as desired by his father. He had passed with distinction the initial test and was admitted as a probationer. He passed in all the subsequent examinations. He passed the medical test. But he would not appear for the riding test which was a must for all candidates. Why? Sri Aurobindo himself explains: "He felt no call for the I.C.S. and was seeking some way to escape from that bondage. By certain manoeuvres he managed to get himself disqualified for riding without himself rejecting the Service, which his family would not have allowed him to do."²²

Elsewhere, in answer to a question why he at all appeared for the I.C.S., he answers: "I appeared for the I.C.S. because my father wanted it and I was too young to understand. Later, I found out what sort of work it is and I had a disgust for an administrative life and I had no interest in administrative work. My interest was in poetry and study of languages and patriotic action."²³

He was given chances—four in number—and the last one was on November 15, 1892. But the candidate failed to appear. He was wandering in the streets of London when he knew very well that he was expected to be at Woolwich! "When he came home later in the evening he told Benoy 'I am chucked', with an almost derisive smile. Benoy took it rather philosophically and offered to play cards. After some time Manomohan dropped in and on learning about his rejection from the I.C.S. set up a howl as if the heavens had fallen. After that all three of them sat down to smoke and began to play cards."²⁴

Striking a jocular note, Sri Aurobindo recalls later on: "It was partly father's fault that I failed in the riding test. He did not send money and riding lessons at Cambridge at that time were rather costly. And the Master was also careless; so long as he got money he simply left me with the horse and I was not particular."

“It was a disappointment to my father because he had arranged everything for me through Sir Henry Cotton. He had arranged to get me placed in the district of Arrah which is regarded as a very fine place and also arranged for Sir Henry Cotton to look after me.”

“All that came down like a wall. I wonder what would have happened to me if I had joined the Civil Service. I think they would have chucked me for laziness and arrears of my work.”²⁵

Hilarity apart, there seems to have been something else more serious, involved in the affair. For despite efforts by well-wishers like Mr. Prothero and James Cotton, and a petition that Aurobindo was persuaded by Benoy Bhushan and Cotton to submit to the India Secretary, Earl of Kimberley, there was a refusal to take a “compassionate view”. Sri Aurobindo alludes to this aspect of the matter in a note to a biographer :

“...at Cambridge he delivered many speeches which, as he afterwards learnt, had their part in determining the authorities to exclude him from the Indian Civil Service; the failure in the riding test was only the occasion, for in some other cases an opportunity was given for remedying this defect in India itself.”

In his book *The Great Descent* Shyamadas Chatterjee speaks of a vision that Sri Aurobindo is said to have had. “On the eve of the riding test, in my drowsiness, I saw two visions : one was the presence of goddess of luck of Britain and another that of a *Sannyasi* with a trident in his hand who told me of the vast cultural heritage of India and inspired me with it and I thought this path better of the two.”

Return to India (1893)

THE QUESTION OF the young man's career naturally loomed ahead. James Cotton, whom Benoy Bhushan knew well, took the initiative and arranged an interview for Aurobindo with Sir Sayajirao Gaekwar, the Ruler of Baroda State in India. The meeting led to Aurobindo's appointment in Baroda State Service. Sri Aurobindo recounts :

“It is strange how things arrange themselves at times. When I failed in the I.C.S. riding-test and was looking for a job the Gaekwar happened to be in London. I don't remember whether he called us or we met him. We consulted an authority about the pay we should propose. We had no idea about these things. He said we could propose Rs. 200, but should accept even 130, for that was quite a good sum. He was calculating according to the pound which was equivalent to Rs. 13; so he took £ 10 as quite a good sum. I left the negotiations to my eldest brother and J. Cotton. The Gaekwar went about telling people that he had got a Civil Service man for Rs. 200.”²⁶

It was now time for Aurobindo to leave England and come back to India to take up his post in Baroda. What were his feelings when he was preparing to leave after fourteen years of stay in that country? Was there regret? No, he says:

“There was no such regret in leaving England, no attachment to the past or misgivings for the future. Few friendships were made in England and none very intimate; the mental atmosphere was not found congenial.

“There was an attachment to English and European thought and literature, but not England as a country; he had no ties there and did not make England his adopted country, as Manomohan did for a time. If there was attachment to a European land as a second country, it was

intellectually and emotionally to one not seen or lived in, in this life, not England, but France.'²⁷

Aurobindo sailed on *S. S. Carthage* early in January 1893. His home-coming, however, was marred by a tragic happening. His father, Dr. K. D. Ghose had been informed wrongly by the Grindlays., his bankers, of Aurobindo's departure by the boat *Roumania* which never reached its destination; it sank off the coast of Portugal. When the tragedy took place, Grindlays telegraphed the news to the doctor, without themselves knowing that Aurobindo had actually taken a later boat. The report came as a shock and the father, who was already suffering from a weak heart, collapsed and died the same night with the son's name on his lips.

The boat, *Carthage*, with Aurobindo on it arrived in Bombay on February 6, 1893.

Preparation

BARODA (1893-1907)

Apollo Bunder

BEFORE HE LEFT England at the end of his fourteen years of stay, Aurobindo had discarded 'Ackroyd' from his name; thenceforth he was to be Aravinda Ghose or Aurobindo.

During the last year of his life in England Sri Aurobindo appears to have had a few spiritual experiences which he does not expressly mention but hints at. They seem to have set in motion a movement during which the 'darkness' that had entered his being while at Darjeeling in his childhood and hung round as an inertia in subsequent years, was shaken off.

The moment he set foot on the land of India at Apollo Bunder in Bombay, a vast Calm descended on him and remained with him for long months thereafter. He writes: "Since I set foot on the Indian soil on the Apollo Bunder in Bombay, I began to have spiritual experiences, but these were not divorced from this world but had an inner and infinite bearing on it, such as a feeling of the Infinite pervading material space and the Immanent inhabiting material objects and bodies. At the same time I found myself entering supraphysical worlds and planes with influences and an effect from them upon the material plane."¹

Also "This Yoga began in London, sprouted the moment I set foot on Apollo Bunder, touching Indian soil, flowered one day in the first year of my stay in Baroda, at the moment when there threatened to be an accident to my carriage."²

Service in Baroda (1893-1907)

SRI AUROBINDO JOINED service in the Survey Settlement Department of the State Government in Baroda on February 8, 1893. He was asked to get to know the procedure in the various departments. He was then shifted to Revenue and from there to the Secretariat. He then moved to the College. Even before formally joining the College, he used to teach French there while still working in the departments. Later, at his own request and on the strong recommendation of Principal Tait, he was appointed as Professor of English. Later he became the Vice-Principal of the College and also acted as its Principal for a time. He was still in the College when he finally left Baroda State Service on June 18, 1907.

All along the Maharaja would call for him whenever assistance was needed for careful drafting, preparing speeches and in general for work of an educational or literary type. He was once specially called to Ootacamund (1895) to prepare a summary of the famous Bapat case. Nirodbaran describes how even nearly four decades later Sri Aurobindo was discussing this case with interest for over an hour with A.B. Purani.³ He is also stated to have carried on the bulk of the correspondence that took place between Baroda State and the Government of India on the alleged insult by the Maharaja in not being present at Baroda when Lord Curzon visited the State in 1900. The Gaekwar was then in Paris.

It appears the Maharaja once took Sri Aurobindo with him as his secretary during his Kashmir trip but there was so much friction between them that the ruler was not encouraged to repeat the experiment. Of the incidents that throw interesting light on the temperaments of the two, a few may be cited.

On one occasion the Maharaja sent for Sri Aurobindo twice in the course of a morning. Not meeting with any response, the Maharaja himself went to Sri Aurobindo's room, found him asleep, and returned without disturbing him.⁴

Sri Aurobindo writes, in the course of a letter (November 7, 1938): “Quite agree with your estimate of Kashmir. The charm of its mountains and rivers and the ideal life dawdling along in the midst of a supreme beauty in the slowly moving leisure of a houseboat—there was a kind of earthly Paradise—also writing poetry on the banks of the Jhelum where it rushed down Kashmir towards the plains. Unfortunately there was the over-industrious Gaekwar to cut short the Paradise! His idea of Paradise was going through administrative papers and making myself and others write speeches for which he got all the credit. But after all, according to the nature, to each one his Eden.”⁵

Also interesting is Nirodbaran’s account of how the Maharaja once issued a circular requiring all officers to attend office on Sundays and also on holidays. Sri Aurobindo did not attend and the Maharaja talked of fining him. “Let him fine as much as he likes, I am not going”, was Sri Aurobindo’s reply. The Maharaja did not proceed.⁶

Sri Aurobindo recalls how the Maharaja gave him a certificate for ability and intelligence “but also for lack of punctuality and regularity!”⁷

In his *Arabinda Prasanga*, Dinendra Kumor Roy records Sri Aurobindo’s estimate of the ruler: “The present Maharaja is capable of ruling over a large empire. As a politician he has no peer in the whole of India.”

New Lamps for Old

EVEN BEFORE HE left England, Sri Aurobindo had been exercised about the political condition of his motherland and had committed himself to work for the liberation of the country. He had thought deeply and had his own vision of the line of action to be adopted. He had noted:

“The patriot who offers advice to a great nation in an era of change and turmoil, should be very confident that he has something worth saying before he ventures to speak; but if he can really put some new aspect on a momentous question or emphasise any side of it that has not been clearly understood, it is his bounden duty, however obscure he may be, to ventilate it.....

“It is time that an Indian who has devoted his best thoughts and aspiration to the service of his country, should have in his turn a patient hearing.”⁸

And as Providence would have it, he got an opportunity to speak very soon after he took up residence in Baroda. For K.G. Deshpande, a friend from his Cambridge days, who was in charge of the English section of *Induprakash*—a Marathi-English weekly from Bombay—invited him to write upon the current political situation in its pages. Sri Aurobindo accepted the invitation, though his official position required him to write anonymously.

Writing under the title *New Lamps for Old*, Sri Aurobindo castigated the current Congress leaders for their policies of petition and prayer and went on to advocate a more vigorous, nationwide agitation with teeth in it.

In his first article (August 7, 1893) he speaks of the high expectations raised by the vociferous protagonists of the Congress and the actualities of the situation: “There was too, a little too much talk about the blessings

of British rule, and the inscrutable Providence which has laid us in the material, on more properly the step-motherly bosom of just and benevolent England. Yet more appalling was the general timidity of the Congress, its glossing over of hard names, its disinclination to tell the direct truth, its fear of too deeply displeasing our masters.”

And he adds with biting sarcasm : “We went out of our way to flatter Mr. Gladstone, a statesman who is not only quite unprincipled and in no way to be relied upon, but whose intervention in an Indian debate has always been of the worst omen to our cause.”

“We did more than flatter Mr. Gladstone; we actually condescended to flatter “General” Booth, a vulgar imposter, a convicted charlatan, who has enriched himself by trading on the sentimental emotions of the English middle class. But here too, we thought, the Congress has perhaps made the common mistake of confounding wealth with merit, and has really taken “the General” for quite a respectable person.”

He concludes : “In its broader aspects the failure of the Congress is still clearer. The walls of the Anglo-Indian Jericho stand without a breach, and the dark spectre of Penury draws her robe over the land in greater volume and with an ampler sweep.”⁹

In the next article he makes mention of some of the typical leadership of the day:

“Popular orators like Mr. Phirozeshah Mehta, who carry the methods of the bar into politics, are very fond of telling people that the Congress had habituated us to act together. Well, that is not quite correct: there is not the slightest evidence to show that we have all learned to talk together, and that is a rather different thing.”

In a searching analysis of the situation, he notes :

“Our actual enemy is not any force exterior to ourselves, but our own crying weaknesses, our cowardice, our selfishness, our hypocrisy, our purblind sentimentalism. I really cannot see why we should rage so furiously against the Anglo-Indians and call them by all manner of *opprobrious epithets*. I grant that they are rude and arrogant, that they govern badly, that they are devoid of any great or generous emotion, that their conduct is that of a small coterie of masters surrounded by a nation of Helots.

Our appeal, the appeal of every high-souled and self-respecting nation, ought not to be to the opinion of the Anglo-Indians, no, nor yet to the British sense of justice, but to our own reviving sense of manhood, to our own sincere fellow-feeling—so far as it can be called sincere—with the silent and suffering people of India.” “If the Congress cannot really face the light of a free and serious criticism, then the sooner it hides its face the better. For nine years, it has been exempt from the ordeal; we have been content to worship it with implicit trust which all religions demand, but which sooner or later leads them to disaster and defeat.”

“The hour seems to have come when the Congress must encounter that searching criticism which sooner or later arrives to all mortal things; and if it is so, to keep our eyes shut will be worse than idle. The only good we shall get by it is to point with a fresh example the aphorism with which I set out. ‘If the blind leads the blind, shall they not both fall into a ditch?’

And in the next article, he sums up his charge in one devastating sentence:

“I say, of the Congress, then, this—that its aims are mistaken, that the spirit in which it proceeds towards their accomplishment is not a spirit of sincerity and whole-heartedness, and that the methods it has chosen are not the right methods, and the leaders in whom it trusts, not the right sort of men to be leaders; in brief, that we are at present the blind led, if not by the blind, at any rate by the one-eyed.”¹⁰

The barbs went home. By the time the first two articles appeared, there was consternation among the high circles of the Congress. And Justice Mahadev Govind Ranade warned the proprietor of the Weekly that he would have to face prosecution for sedition if the writings continued in that line. Deshpande requested Sri Aurobindo to tone down. The suggestion certainly did not appeal to Sri Aurobindo but he obliged by speaking no more of the current politics. Instead he wrote on the philosophical aspects of politics drawing upon historical developments elsewhere—ancient and contemporary—and brought the series to a close with the ninth article appearing on March 6, 1894.

He recalled the whole episode years later:

“I had no interest in the administrative life. My interest was in poetry and literature, and the study of languages and patriotic action.

When I came to Baroda from England I found out what the Congress was like at that time and I formed a strong contempt for it. Then I came into touch with Deshpande, Tilak, Madhav Rao and others. Deshpande requested me to write something in the *Induprakash*. There I strongly criticised the Congress for its moderate policy. The articles were so fiery that M. G. Ranade, the great Maratha leader, asked the proprietor of the paper not to allow such seditious things to appear in his columns; otherwise he might be arrested and imprisoned. Deshpande approached me with this news and requested me to write something less violent. I then began to write about the philosophy of politics, leaving aside the practical aspect of politics. But I soon got disgusted with it. ”¹¹

It would appear Justice Ranade was keen on meeting the young man who was throwing such political dynamite; and when the meeting did come about in Bombay when Sri Aurobindo was on his way back to Baroda from Bengal in 1894, he made a funny suggestion. Sri Aurobindo recounts in his reminiscences of prison life:

“I remembered, fifteen years back, after return home from England, I had written some bitterly critical articles in the *Induprakash* of Bombay against the petitionary ethics of the then Congress. Seeing that these articles were influencing the minds of the young, the late Mahadev Govind Ranade had told me, when I met him, for nearly half an hour, that I should give up writing these articles and advised me to take up some other Congress work. He was desirous of my taking up the work of prison reform. I was astonished and unhappy at the unexpected suggestion and had refused to undertake that work. I did not know then that this was a prelude to the distant future and that one day God himself would keep me in prison for a year and make me see the cruelty and futility of the system and the need for reform.”¹²

Bankim Chandra Chatterjee

ON THE PASSING away of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee in 1894, Sri Aurobindo wrote a series of seven studies entitles “Bankim Chandra Chatterjee—By a Bengalee” in the Induprakash from July 16 to August 27, 1894. His name was not mentioned, instead the articles were signed “Zero”.

In his first article on the childhood and youth of this “King of Bengali prose”, he writes: “The first picture we have of his childhood is his mastering the alphabet at a single reading; and this is not only the initial picture but an image and prophecy of the rest.”

“In a single year, he had gone through the Mugdhabodh, Raghuvansa, Bhatti and the Meghaduta.”

“He was together with Jodunath Bose, our first B. A., even in this detail leading the way for his countrymen.”

And then he makes a few observations that adumbrate even at this early period what was to develop into his philosophy of education later on. He states: “We are a scholastic people and in our life examinations and degrees fill up half the book,. But examinations and degrees are a minor episode in the history of a mind. An European writer has acutely observed that nothing which is worth knowing can be taught. That is a truth which Dr. Bhandarkar, when he can spare time from his Carlyle, might ponder over with profit . Not what a man learns, but what he observes for himself in life and literature is the formative agency in his existence, and the actual shape it will take is much determined by the sort of social air he happens to breathe at that critical moment when the mind is choosing its road.”

Describing the scene in “The Bengal he lived in”(Chap. 2), he writes:

“Rammohun Roy arose with a new religion in his hand, which was developed on original lines by men almost greater one thinks than he, by Rajnarain Bose and Devendranath Tagore. The two Dutts, Okhay Kumar and Michael Madhu Sudan, began a new prose and new poetry. Vidyasagar, scholar, sage and intellectual dictator, laboured hugely like the Titan he was, to create a new Bengali language and a new Bengali society, while in vast and original learning Rajendra Lal Mitra has not met his match.”

Looking at the wider horizons of the country, he writes:

“Dr. Bhandarkar is a violent social reformer and wants to throw odium upon Hindu society; Mr. Ranade’s hobby is a Conservative Radicalism and the spirit moves him to churn the ocean of statistics in a sense more agreeable to his own turn of mind; a third authority, prejudiced against Western Culture, traces all premature deaths to pleasure and winebibbing. Each starts from his own sensations, each builds his web of argument in the spirit of a sophist. To this Dr. Bhandarkar brings his moral ardour and grave eloquence, Mr. Ranade his trained reason and distinguished talent, the religionist his prejudices and cold precepts.”

Bankim was a product of this age: “Bankim was blessed or cursed with a universal talent. Everything he touched, shaped itself to his hand. It would have been easy for him to make disastrous mistakes; to miss his vocation, waste himself in England and at the end to leave no enduring monument to his personality behind. What saved him? It was the initial stimulus and the cultured environment; it was that he lived among men who could distinguish a talent when they saw it and once distinguished were bent on realising it, among men in fact who had some instinct for finding their way. With a limited creature like man, the power of the environment is immense. Genius it is true exists independently of environments and by much reading and observation may attain to self-expression but it is environment that makes self-expression easy and natural; that provides sureness, verve, stimulus. Here lies the importance to the mind in its early stage of self-culture of fine social surroundings—that sort of surroundings which our Universities do nothing and ought to have done everything to create.”

As an official of the Bengal Government, Bankim had his cross to bear the “Indigocrats” of the Sunderbans and generally the crude young

men from England who had come to seek their fortunes on this sub-continent. Sri Aurobindo narrates an incident or two that vividly bring before our eyes the insufferable temper of those days: "Walking in Eden Garden he chanced across Munro, the Presidency Commissioner, a farouche bureaucrat with the manners of an English man and the temper of a badly-educated hyena. Bankim examined the queer curiosity, as one might any queer curiosity, with a certain lazy interest, but no signal of respect. He was unaware at this time that to salaam any stray European you may meet is the highest privilege of a Hindu and the whole duty of a Deputy Magistrate. But he was soon to receive instruction; for His Hyenaship was off in a rage to the Government and by a little private roaring easily got Bankim transferred to Jahajpur in Orissa."

Speaking of his versatility; "Bankim, the greatest of novelists, had versatility developed to its highest expression. Scholar, poet, essayist, novelist, philosopher, lawyer, critic, official, philologist and religious innovator, the whole world seemed to be shut up in his single brain. At first he looks like a bundle of contradictions. He had a genius for language and a gift for law; he could write a good official papers and he could write a matchless prose; he could pass examinations and he could root out an organised tyranny; he could concern himself with the largest problems of metaphysics and with the smallest details of word-formation; he had a feeling for the sensuous facts of life and feeling for the delicate spiritualities of religion; he could learn grammar and he could write poetry."

"The body of work he gave us in nearly forty years of intellectual activity amounts to ten novels, two critical works on religion and some scattered literature. Small in quantity, it is pure gold in quality. And it may be that in no case would he have written much. Nature gives us quartz profusely and mixed alloy in abundance, but pure gold in rare parcels and infinitesimal portions."

His contribution to the shaping of Bengali language:

"In Bankim's hands the Bengali language, before stammering and inarticulate, became a rich, musical and flexible organ vibrating to every human emotion and expressive of every beautiful or noble thought."

"He more than any one exalted Bengali from the status of a dialect to the majesty of a language."

And finally, an assessment of his life: “When posterity comes to crown with her praises the Makers of India, she will place her most splendid laurel not on the sweating temples of a place-hunting politician nor on the narrow forehead of a noisy social reformer but on the serene brow of that gracious Bengali who never clamoured for place or power, but did his work in silence for love of his work, even as nature does and, just because he had no aim but to give out the best that was in him. was able to create a language, literature and a nation.”¹³

Being of Light

IT WAS DURING the first year of his stay in Baroda that a significant incident took place. Once Sri Aurobindo was going in his horse carriage towards the city from the Camp Road. As they reached the side of the public gardens there arose the possibility of an accident. He willed that it should be prevented and immediately a Being of Light emerged out of him, mastered the situation and averted the accident. This was his first experience of the Divinity within himself. He was to commemorate this experience, over fifty years later in a sonnet written on 13.9.1939.

THE GODHEAD¹⁴

I sat behind the dance of Danger's hooves
 In the shouting street that seemed a futurist's whim
 And suddenly felt, exceeding Nature's grooves,
 In me, enveloping me the body of Him.

Above my head a mighty head was seen,
 A face with the calm of immortality
 And an omnipotent gaze that held the scene
 In the vast circle of its sovereignty.

His hair was mingled with the sun and breeze;
 The world was in His heart and He was I :
 I housed in me the Everlasting's peace,
 The strength of One whose substance cannot die.

The moment passed and all was as before:
 Only that deathless memory I bore.

Visit to Family

SRI AUROBINDO VISITED Bengal in the year 1894 for the first time after his return from England. It was a family reunion: he met his mother Swarnalata, sister Sarojini, brother Barin, uncle Jogendra and grandfather Rajnarayan.

But his mother did not recognise him, afflicted as she was by a mental malady that ran through her family. "My Aurobindo was not so big, he was small", she protested. It was explained to her that her son had come back from England after completion of his studies; some memory flashed and she recalled: "My Aurobindo had a cut on his finger" And there it was, the mark of a cut from broken glass! When it was shown to her, she was satisfied.

How did he look at that time? Sarojini describes: "A very delicate face, long hair cut in English fashion, Sejda (older brother) was a very shy person."

Sri Aurobindo visited his family perhaps once a year during the Pujas in this period. In the course of a letter to his sister, dated August 25, 1894, he writes:

"It will be, I fear, quite impossible to come to you again so early as the Puja, though if I only could, I should start tomorrow. Neither my affairs, nor my finances will admit of it.

"Will you also let me have the name of Barin's English composition Book and its compiler? I want such a book badly, as this will be useful to me not only in Bengali but in Gujarati. There are no convenient books like that here.

"I am quite well. I have brought a fund of health with me from Bengal, which, I hope it will take me some time to exhaust; but I have just passed my twenty-second milestone, August 15 last, since my birthday and am beginning to get dreadfully old."¹⁵

As can be seen in his letter, Sri Aurobindo started his study of languages very soon after he settled down in Baroda. He deepened his knowledge of Bengali, learnt Sanskrit by himself and proceeded to get acquainted with languages like Gujarati and Marathi which were the current media in the State of Baroda. He was a voracious reader and kept himself plentifully supplied with books. His cousin Basanti Devi writes: "Auro Dada used to arrive with two or three trunks. We always thought they would contain costly suits and other luxury items like scents etc. When he opened them I used to look and wonder. What is this? A few ordinary clothes and all the rest books and nothing but books! Does Auro Dada like to read all these? We all want to chat and enjoy ourselves in the vacations. Does he want to spend even this time in reading these books? But because he liked this reading did not mean that he did not join us in our talks and chats and our merry-making. His talks used to be full of wit and humour."¹⁶

And of course he wrote poetry. His first collection of poems. *Songs to Myrtilla and other poems*, appeared in 1895, for 'private circulation'. Most of them were poems composed by him when he was studying at Cambridge (1890-92).

He began an extensive study of Indian literature, religious and secular; the Mahabharata, Kalidasa, Bhavabhuti were some of his interests. He would also read Homer, Dante, Horace. He read and translated passages from the Ramayana into English. It appears that on seeing his renderings from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, Romesh Chander Dutt, the well known scholar-civilian, while on a visit to Baroda, remarked: "I am sorry to have wasted so much of my labours on this work. Had I seen your translations before, I would never have published mine. It now appears that my translations have been a child's play beside yours."¹⁷

He also wrote critical studies on themes like Kalidasa, Vyasa, textual questions on the Mahabharata etc. Describing his daily routine, A. B. Purani writes: "After morning tea Sri Aurobindo used to write poetry. He would continue up to ten o'clock. Bath was between ten and eleven o'clock and lunch was at eleven o'clock. Sri Aurobindo used to read journals while taking his meals. He took less of rice and more of bread. Once a day there was meat or fish.

"There were intervals when Sri Aurobindo took to complete

vegetarian diet. He was indifferent to taste. He found Marathi food too hot and Gujarati food too rich in ghee. Later, he once had dinner at B. G. Tilak's which consisted of rice, puri, dal and vegetables. He liked it for its 'spartan simplicity', Sri Aurobindo was in the habit of reading far into the night and retiring very late. He was a late riser."¹⁸

During these years he would send money regularly to his family for the maintenance of his mother, and the education of his sister Sarojini at Bankipore; his younger brother Barin was also with Sarojini. The other two brothers had returned from England and were suitably placed, but they gave no help. Sri Aurobindo explained it away with characteristic indulgence:

"Dada (Benoy Bhushan) is in Coochbehar state service and so he has to maintain a certain high standard of living. Manomohan is married and marriage is an expensive luxury."¹⁹

At the College

EVEN AS HE was working in the Govt. Departments, Sri Aurobindo's services were lent to the College for teaching French for certain periods in a week (1897). More teaching work came to be added and he started teaching English as well. Later on he was appointed acting Professor of English; that was in 1898 when Prof. Littledale went on leave. Two years later—in 1900—Principal Tait prevailed upon the Mahajaraja to appoint Sri Aurobindo as a permanent Professor of English. He rose to be the Vice-Principal of the College (1905) and also acted for the Principal in his absence (March 1905-February 1906).

Sri Aurobindo never prepared elaborate notes for his lectures. He recalled later: "I was not so conscientious as a Professor. I never used to look at the Notes and sometimes my explanations did not agree with them. I was Professor of English and for some time of French. What was surprising to me was that students used to take down everything verbatim and mug it up. This sort of thing could never have happened in England. In India the students, besides taking down my notes, used to get notes of Professors from Bombay, especially if they happened to be examiners."

"Once I was giving a lecture on Southey's *Life of Nelson*. And my lecture was not in agreement with the notes in the book. So the students remarked that it was not at all like what was in the notes. I replied that I hadn't read them. In any case, they are mostly rubbish. I could never go into the minute details. I read, and left it to my mind to absorb what it could."²⁰

Advocate Patkar, an old student of his, describes:

"I had the good fortune to be his student when I was in the Inter Class. His method of teaching was a novel one. In the beginning he used to give a series of introductory lectures for initiating the student into the subject-matter of the text, which gave a fair idea about the

author and his views on particular items bearing on the text. After preparing the student to understand the text in this manner, he used to start reading the text in the classroom, stopping wherever necessary to explain the meaning of difficult and obscure sentences. Then after finishing the text, he used to dictate general lectures bearing on the various aspects pertaining to the text. These lectures, which were given at the close of the term, were availed of by many students belonging to other colleges.

“But more than his college lectures, it was a treat to hear him on the platform. He used to preside occasionally over the meetings of the College Debating Society. When he was to preside, the college Central Hall which is sufficiently large was almost packed to the full with the audience which not only consisted of the College students but many educated persons from the outside public especially when the subject selected for the debate was interesting. Mr. Ghose was never an orator but a speaker of a very high order, and when he rose to speak, there was a pin-drop silence and the audience used to listen to him with rapt attention. Without any gestures or movements of the limbs, he stood like a statue—Motionless—and the language used to flow like a stream from his lips with a natural ease and melody that kept his audience spell-bound. Every sentence that he uttered was full of meaning and set the audience thinking for days together. He was at his best when the subject matter pertained to religion or philosophy. He rarely dabbled in politics but references were made now and then to the downtrodden conditions of India. and illiteracy and ignorance of the masses. Though it is more than five decades now since I heard him on the Baroda College platform, I still remember the metallic ring of his sweet voice as if I heard him yesterday.”²¹

In an interesting address at the annual social gathering of the College on July 22, 1899, Sri Aurobindo compares conditions at the universities of Cambridge and Oxford with those in Indian universities and observes how in the former the students are exposed to many influences of a corporate character in addition to the excellence of the teaching provided in the academic sphere. He underlines: “Examinations, however important, are only a preliminary. I lay stress upon this because there is too much of a tendency in this country to regard education as a mere episode, finished when once the degree is obtained. But the University cannot and does not pretend to complete a man’s education; it merely

gives some materials to his hand or points out certain paths he may tread, and it says to him, 'Here are the materials I have given into your hands, it is for you to make of them what you can'; or, "These are the paths I have equipped you to travel, it is, yours to tread them to the end, and by your success in them justify me before the world'."22

He left deep impression not only on his students but on some of his colleagues as well. Dr. C. R. Reddy recalls:

"I had the honour of knowing him. We had a number of friends in common. Mr. A. B. Clark, the Principal of the Baroda College, remarked to me. 'So you met Aurobindo Ghosh. Did you notice his eyes? There is a mystic fire and light in them. They penetrate into the beyond.' And he added, 'If Joan of Arc heard heavenly voices, Aurobindo probably sees heavenly visions'."

Dinendra Kumar Roy

SRI AUROBINDO HAD learnt some Bengali while in England, as part of his studies as an I.C.S. Probationer (having opted for service in Bengal). He studied the language and its literature further after coming to Baroda as is evidenced by his studies of the works of Bankim Chandra, Madhusudan Dutt etc. Still he felt the need of a deeper study, especially of the spoken idiom of Bengali. So he secured the services of a notable litterateur in the language, Dinendra Kumar Roy, in the autumn of 1898. Dinendra was more a companion than a teacher. It was a flexible arrangement: he stayed with Sri Aurobindo and helped him as and when required; and on his side he learnt French and German from him. He stayed for nearly two years, 1898-99, and later wrote a book, *Arobindaprasanga* (in Bengali) which is highly interesting for the light it sheds on the personality, nature, way of living of Sri Aurobindo in those days. A few extracts (translated) may be quoted:

“I found him wearing an old fashioned Nagra shoe, coarse Ahmedabad mill cloth and on his body a tight-fitting Merjai, his hair parting in the middle with long hair falling on the shoulder, with dreamy eyes. Within a few days I could see that earthly meanness had no place in his heart. Aurobindo is not a man of this world but a god come down. How could a man like him who spent fourteen years from his boyhood to youth in England in the midst of Western civilisation of splendour and refinement be so simple and a lover of his country and culture?”

“Waiting for some days I put this question directly to him and his answer came smilingly: ‘Those who go there and live for two-three years become much charmed by the outward glamour but those who live long could find out what is good or bad in their culture and accordingly, they could shape themselves’.”

“Aurobindo used to get handsome pay when I was there, in 1989-99 but I found him short of funds at the end of every month, although he had no vices which we find in every England-returned man of this country. Seeing him filling up a money-order form one day, I had the desire to send some money home. As I approached him with this proposal, he stopped writing the form and handed me over the last farthing he had in his bag. Although I refused to accept the same, seeing the condition of his purse, I had to accept on his insistence that my need was greater than his. Khasirao Jadhav, a friend of the Maharaja, loved Aurobindo like his brother for his kind heart, learning, meek and gentle nature. He was unaccustomed to wearing hat, collar and neck-tie and even when invited by the Maharaja for work and dinner with him he used to visit him with the simplest clothing on his person with a *pireli* cap on his head. He never used a soft bed; he used a blanket of an ordinary type in winter. His food was as simple as his clothing and living. In a word, he used to live the life of a complete Brahmachari.”

“Although he could not speak Bengali, he learned Sanskrit and in his opinion Valmiki was the greatest of the poets ever produced on earth. He used to say often that he was charmed at the poetry of Dante and satisfied reading Homer but none could approach Valmiki.

“Just before evening he used to pace up and down swiftly on the verandah of the house.

“He had an old Victoria coach which had a horse whose movement was that of an ass. The low and high of Baroda used to know the name of Aurobindo because of his gentle behaviour and charitable disposition. The intellectuals of Baroda used to respect him for his extraordinary genius. His students used to love and respect him like a god. His way of teaching was not customary and his students were charmed by it.

“Before a Jewel Lamp, caring little for mosquito bites I saw him sitting till late hours at night reading books or discussing literature. He appeared to me to be a Yogi immersed in meditation. He had books of almost all European languages, French, German, English, Russian, Greek, Latin and Hebrew, also Sanskrit books like Ramayana, Mahabharata, Kalidasa’s complete works. He was very fond of Russian and he used to say that Russian would occupy the topmost place in literature. He used to read Bengali for two-three days in a week and often that also he missed. Thacker and Atmaram Radhabai Sagun, the two big book-

sellers of Bombay used to send him books in packing cases. And I was surprised to find the books completed before the month was out.

“His laughter was simple as a child’s and as liquid and soft. Though an inflexible will showed at the corners of his lips. there was not the slightest trace in his heart of any worldly ambition of the common human selfishness; there was only the longing, rare even among the gods, of sacrificing himself for the relief of human suffering.

“Aurobindo was always indifferent to pleasure and pain, prosperity and adversity, praise and blame. He bore all hardships with an unruffled mind.”²³

Literary Activity

ALL THE WHILE his literary activity was in full swing. Mention has been made of his studies in the Epics. His “Problem of the Mahabharata” and “Notes on the Mahabharata” *written during this period are still thought-provoking. He translated selections from the *Sabha* and the *Udyoga Parvas* of the Mahabharata and also from the *Bala*, *Ayudhya* and *Aranya Kandas* of the Ramayana; altogether about 2000 lines of blank verse.

He wrote narrative poems, *Urvasie* (published 1896), *Love and Death*, (written 1899) based upon legends and hints found in the Mahabharata. Also *Savitri*, his greatest work was begun at this time. He began translating some of the classics from Sanskrit literature: *Nitishataka* of Bhartrihari, *Meghadutam*** and *Vikramorvasie* and the first Canto of *Kumarasambhavam* of Kalidasa. He wrote some essays on Kalidasa: the Age of Kalidasa. Translating Kalidasa, Characters of Kalidasa etc. Dt. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar observes: “Sri Aurobindo set about the task of translation always with a sense of commitment, and only after clarifying to his own satisfaction the principles that should govern each particular adventure in translation. Also he continually experimented: for example, he tried the Heroic couplet, the Locksley Hall metre and, finally blank verse for rendering the *anushtubh* metre of the Mahabharata and Ramayana. He used a variety of metrical and stanza patterns for *The Century of Life* (Bhartrihari’s *Nitishataka*). And he used a five-line stanza in the first draft of the *Birth of the War-God*, but switched over to blank verse in the second and third drafts of the same poem.” He also translated from Bengali the mystical poems of Nidhu Babu, Horu Thakur, Jnanada, Chandidas and Vidyapati. They were later published in *Poems from Bengali* and *Songs of Vidyapati*,

* Later included in the publication Vyasa and Valmiki.

** This translation in terza rima has been lost among papers seized and confiscated during the political days to follow.

Among other translations found in his manuscripts of this period are renderings of the first six chapters, of the Gita.

His plays, *The Viziers of Basora*, *Rydogune*, were written, at least in their first draft at this time.

Mr. Patkar says: "His passion for reading was very great. He was a huge reader and his reading was not confined to any particular subject but it was diverse and extended to various compartments of human knowledge. He was not a mere reader as a majority of us are, but a great thinker and a writer too. After reading any book he used to brood over what he had read for a time and then commit his views to paper. I have seen volumes of such writings in his room in different languages such as Greek, Latin, French and English."

Marriage and After

SRI AUROBINDO MARRIED in April 1901. The bride, Mrinalini, was the daughter of Bhupal Chandra Bose, a well placed Government officer. Sri Aurobindo selected her from the many offers he had before him. The marriage was performed in Calcutta. A difficulty of a special kind—typical of those times came up at the time of the ceremony and that was the question of *prayaschitta*, purificatory rites, that Sri Aurobindo was required to undergo for having crossed the seas in going to England. Like his father earlier, Sri Aurobindo refused to comply. A *via media* of shaving the head was proposed, that too was turned down. However, an extra monetary consideration persuaded a sensible Brahmin priest to do the needful and complete the marriage ceremony. It was performed according to Hindu rites and was attended by Lord Sinha and Sir Jagadish Chandra Bose among others. Sri Aurobindo was twenty-nine and Mrinalini fourteen. As in the case of several other great men who later turned to spiritual life, in Sri Aurobindo's case also his marriage did not prove to be a conspicuous success.

After the marriage Sri Aurobindo visited Deoghar and thence went to Naini Tal; Mrinalini and his sister Sarojini accompanied him. The Gaekwar was there at the time. After a month's stay at the hill station the party reached Baroda early in July.

Very soon Barin joined the household. Among his many interests was spiritualism. He read a book on the subject and started experiments with planchette, table-tapping, etc. Sri Aurobindo would join on some evenings. Regarding the predictions at these sessions, Sri Aurobindo states, "there was notably a symbolic anticipation of Lord Curzon's subsequent unexpected departure from India, and again, of the first suppression of the national movement and greatness of Tilak's attitude amidst the storm."²⁴ On another occasion, Sri Rama-Krishna Parmahansa was called and he was reported to have said "mandir gado, mandir gado (make a temple, make a temple)". That was the

time when idea of a Temple, mandir, for political sanyasins to be called Bhawani Mandir was very much in their minds. It was only many years later that Sri Aurobindo pointed out that it was not a signal for the kind of physical temple they had in mind but really a call to build a temple to the Divine Mother in themselves, so that she may dwell in each one.

In the summer of 1903, on his return from leave in Bengal, Sri Aurobindo was asked to proceed to Kashmir—in May-August—with the Maharaja and be in charge of the secretary's work during the trip. It has already been noted that things did not turn out too well in this direction. However, this visit was notable for a remarkable experience he had while walking on the ridge of *Takht-i-Suleman* or Hill of Shankaracharya. It is best described in his own words, though in another context:

“One stands upon a mountain ridge and glimpses or mentally feels a wideness, a pervasiveness, a nameless Vast in Nature; then suddenly there comes the touch, a revelation, a flooding, the mental loses itself in the spiritual, one bears the first invasion of the Infinite.”²⁵

He refers to this experience in a sonnet written much later, in 1939:

ADWAITA

I walked on the high-wayed Seat of Solomon
Where Shankaracharya's tiny temple stands
Facing Infinity from Time's edge, alone
On the bare ridge ending earth's vain romance.

Around me was a formless solitude:
All had become one strange Unnamable,
An unborn sole Reality world-nude,
Topless and fathomless, for ever still.

A Silence that was Being's only word,
The unknown beginning and the voiceless end
Abolishing all things moment-seen or heard,
On an incommunicable summit reigned,

A lonely Calm and void unchanging Peace
On the dumb crest of Nature's mysteries.²⁶

19.10.1939

The Revolutionary Movement

THOUGH HE WAS obliged to suspend giving public expression to his approach to political questions, after the first two articles in the *Induprakash*, Sri Aurobindo did not cease to concern himself with the situation. Even before he returned to India, he had studied deeply the course of history in Europe and elsewhere; he had acquainted himself with the philosophies and methods of revolution in Ireland, Italy and France. He had come to believe that a similar approach—with whatever modifications suited to Indian conditions—was called for here also.

What he saw on arrival in India was discouraging enough. Whatever political awakening there was, was confined to only a fringe of the middle classes. And these elements too had very limited aspirations and were ringed with fear and cowardice. They sought to improve things by waiting upon the sweet will of the conqueror. Sri Aurobindo perceived the need of broadening the base of the movement and to this end, he foresaw the need of a nationwide awakening and preparation for an eventual revolution. He envisaged a period of full thirty years for such a programme to succeed. His reading of the English character, based upon first-hand knowledge gained during the fourteen years of stay in that country, convinced him that the British would yield when they saw that they could not hold down the country any longer by constitutional means. He was to observe later: “The English people, except for a few autocrats like Curzon have a constitutional temperament. They will violently oppose their being kicked out of the country but they won’t object to their being slowly shouldered out as in the Dominions.” Also, “The British people have one weakness. They can’t go on with brutal methods of repression for a long time. They have their prestige to keep up before the world and they want popular support. So in the end they come to a compromise.”²⁷

But he had to move with due caution. the fate of secret revolutionary bodies was not very encouraging. His own grandfather, Raj Narayan Bose, had started such a society (which had young Rabindranath Tagore as one of its members) but it did not survive. He remembered that the 'Lotus and Dagger' society of his Cambridge days did not last even for a day. His own position as a public servant in the State imposed some restraints.

Round about 1899, a well-built young man, Jatindranath Banerjee (later Niralamba Swamy) arrived in Baroda with a view to getting military training that would prove useful in the revolutionary movement that was gathering behind the scenes in Bengal. At that time there was a bar against Bengalis as not being suitable for martial occupations. However, with the help of Khasirao and Lt. Madhavrao Jadhav, Sri Aurobindo got him admitted to the army—as a trooper in the cavalry—declaring him to be a man from U.P. and not a Bengali. On completion of his training, Sri Aurobindo got him to work in the revolutionary programme that he himself intended to launch in Bengal. He returned to Calcutta in 1900 with Sri Aurobindo's instructions for securing resources and young men for revolutionary work in that part of the country.

Sri Aurobindo was aware of the existence of some secret groups working for revolutionary ends in different parts of India. But there was no effective coordination among them. There was, at that time, a secret revolutionary society in Western India under the leadership of Thakur Ram Singh of the State of Udaipur. It had a branch in Bombay, conducted by a council of five which helped in organising the movement in Maharashtra. Through Sri Mandavale who was a member of this body, Sri Aurobindo took the oath of the Revolutionary Party and joined the organisation. The Thakur was actively engaged in winning over regiments of the Indian army to the revolutionary side; he had actually won over three of four regiments. Subsequently Sri Aurobindo paid a visit to Central India where he met some of the officers and men of these regiments. That was in 1902.

During his annual visits to Bengal, Sri Aurobindo used to look around, establish connections and sow the seeds of his programme. What was going on "was something very childish—things like beating magistrates and so on. Later it turned into terrorism and dacoities, which were not at all my idea or intention" (Sri Aurobindo). His idea

was to organise the movement secretly in every village and subdivision among the youth while obtaining resources from the older people who were in sympathy. He aimed at a country-wide open armed revolution.

In 1902, Sri Aurobindo visited Midnapur and met Hemchandra Das who was an important figure. Rifle shooting was being practised on his lands. It was then that it was decided to start six centres of revolutionary movement in Bengal. During the summer of this year he took privilege leave for a month and utilised it to promote his revolutionary work in Bengal. Jatin Banerjee who had been sent to Bengal made contacts with Barrister P. Mitter who was already involved in similar work and started an organisation of young men in his compound. Jain arranged a meeting between Mitter and Sri Aurobindo during his visit to Calcutta. It was at this time that he administered the oath to Hemchandra. During the taking of the oath each held the Gita in one hand and a sword in the other and vowed to secure the freedom of the motherland at any cost.

Sri Aurobindo thus formed a link between the secret movement in Eastern India and the Western. Lokamanya Tilak was, at that time, fanning the revolutionary spirit in Maharashtra.

In the same year (1902) a society was started at Deoghar under Satyen Bose. The spirit of revolution was spreading rapidly and even government servants were sympathetic, some of whom even joined the movement.

Sister Nivedita visited Baroda in October 1902. She had accepted the political ideology of Swami Vivekenanda and due to her consequent involvement she had ultimately to sever her connection with the Ramakrishna Mission. She had come to Baroda to give some lectures and Sri Aurobindo went to the station to receive her. She had heard of him as a worshipper of Kali and a believer in Shakti; and he had read and appreciated her book *Kali, the Mother*. Nivedita sought an interview with the Maharaja and Sri Aurobindo accompanied her to the meeting. She tried to persuade the Maharaja to join and help the revolutionary movement. But he was too shrewd to commit himself and merely told her that he would send his reply through Ghose. Of course he never did. But he was very much surprised to learn that Sri Aurobindo was taking such keen interest in the movement.

Sri Aurobindo's recollections of her are enlightening:

“She was one of the revolutionary leaders. She went about visiting various places to come into contact with the people. She was open, frank and talked freely of her revolutionary plans to everybody. There was no concealment about her. Whenever she used to speak on revolution, it was her very soul, her true personality that came out. Her whole mind and life expressed itself thus. Yoga was yoga but revolutionary work it was that seemed intended for her. That is fire! Her book, *Kali, the Mother* is very inspiring but revolutionary and not at all non-violent. She went about among the Thakurs of Rajputana trying to preach to them revolution. At that time everybody wanted some kind of revolution. I myself met several Rajput Thakurs who, unsuspected by the Government, had revolutionary ideas and tendencies. One Thakur, Ram Singh, who joined our movement, was afterwards caught and put in jail. He suddenly died there in a short time. Moropant said, ‘he died out of fright.’ But he was not a man to be frightened. They may have poisoned him. More than one Indian battalion were ready to help us. I knew a Punjabi sentry at Alipore who spoke to me about the revolution.”

“Whenever we met we spoke about politics and revolution. But her eyes showed a power of concentration and revealed a capacity for going into trance.”²⁸

The Ahmedabad session of the Congress was held in December 1902 and Sri Aurobindo met Tilak at the venue. The Lokamanya had been eager to know the young writer of the *Induprakash* articles. Mandavale arranged the meeting and there was an identity of approach.

As part of preparation for the revolutionary programme, Madhavrao Jadhav, nephew of Khasirao, was sent to England to receive training in arms and manufacture of bombs, revolvers etc. Sri Aurobindo bore part of the expenses.

In the meanwhile Barin, Sri Aurobindo's younger brother, had come and joined. He was full of the revolutionary spirit, imbibed mostly from his elder brother. Sri Aurobindo sent him to Bengal some time in 1902 to help Jatin. A third young man also joined; he was Abinash Bhattacharya. All the three worked together: Jatin among the professionals e.g. doctors, lawyers etc. and the other two among students. Young men were provided with facilities to learn lathi-play, fencing and

wherever possible riding. After about six months, however, there were differences among these young men and they separated; Jatin moved away leaving the other two.

Sri Aurobindo went to Calcutta in February 1903 on a month's leave mainly to resolve the differences between Jatin and Barin. Jatin with his military background was insisting upon stern discipline while Barin was not amenable to it. Most of the young men supported Barin in his refusal to accept the 'generalship' of Jatin. Sri Aurobindo heard both the sides and formed a Committee of five, P. Mitter, C. R. Das, Sister Nivedita, Jatin, Surendranath Tagore, and vested it with an overall authority. The differences, however, continued and the work suffered.

Associated with P. Mitter was Bibhuti Bhushan Bhattacharya and Sarala Ghoshal who had organised several young people's clubs, ostensibly for lathi-play. Sri Aurobindo notes how under P. Mitter's leadership the revolutionary work spread wide and contained tens of thousands of young men: "I was neither the founder nor the leader (of the revolutionary movement). It was P. Mitter and Miss Ghoshal who started it on the inspiration of Baron Okakura. They had already started it before I went to Bengal and when I was there I came to hear of it. I simply kept myself informed of their work."²⁹

But there were bickerings among groups and it was difficult to hold them together.

It was, however, the announcement of the partition of Bengal on July 20, 1905 that provided a providential signal for all groups to get together and bring about a tremendous explosion that was to change the history of the whole country. For the movement spread beyond Bengal. Sri Aurobindo sent an urgent message to the workers in Calcutta: "This is a fine opportunity. Carry on the anti-partition agitation powerfully. We will get many workers for the movement." He followed it up later with a pamphlet, *No Compromise*, No press in Calcutta dared to print it. However Abinash and friends got it composed by a Marathi revolutionary colleague, had it printed and distributed in thousands. Keshavmurti quotes from the *Galpa Bharati* of Abhinash Bhattacharya:

"Sri Aurobindo sent a booklet on *No Compromise*. No press would print it. At length we bought type, stick, case and other things and had

the writing composed in private by a Marathi young man Kulkarni who stayed with us. Several thousand copies were got printed overnight in a press and distributed to newspaper editors and distinguished men in educated circles. Barin and I took it to Surendranath Banerjee, the leader of the moderate group in Bengal. He asked us to leave it with him. But we were importunate. He gave it a passing notice and then could no more lay it by. He read it through with absorbed attention and felt astonished and asked who the writer was. 'It is not possible for an Indian, even for a Bengali, to write such English with such striking presentation of facts and arguments. 'When he learned that Aurobindo Ghose was the writer, he said, 'Oh yes, he alone could write it'.'

Turn to Yoga

BARIN WAS SEIZED with an imperative need to build a glorious Temple to the Mother Divine which would serve as a perennial source of inspiration and strength to all the young workers who were gathering to dedicate themselves to the noble mission of liberating their motherland. For this purpose he was in search of a suitable place in the heart of a forest or the top of a mountain. This quest took him on one of his tours to Amarkantak in the interior of the Vindhya mountains. He came back with an obstinate mountain fever which would not yield to any treatment. It was at this moment that a Naga Sannyasi happened to come. Seeing the plight of the young man, he took a cup of water, cut it into four by making two crosses with a knife while chanting a mantra, and asked Barin to drink it. He added that the fever would not bother him the next day. The fever did leave as told by him and Barin was cured.

Sri Aurobindo who had watched the whole proceeding was impressed. He had witnessed, at first hand, the power of yoga and he saw its potentialities for the work he had undertaken. Despite a normal interest in these matters, he had hitherto refused to involve himself in yoga and its practice, for, as he writes, "I had thought that a yoga which required me to give up the world was not for me. I had to liberate my country. I took it seriously when I learnt that the same tapasya which one does to get away from the world can be turned to action. I learnt that yoga gives power, and thought why should I not get the power and use it to liberate my country."³⁰

It was a belief in those days that *Pranayama* was an indispensable preparation for serious yoga. Accordingly Sri Aurobindo consulted Engineer Devdhar, a disciple of Swami Brahmananda of Chandod, and started practising it. And the results were indeed spectacular. He says:

“My own experience is that the brain become *prakashamaya*, full of light. When I was practising Pranayama at Baroda, I used to do it for five to six hours in the day, three hours in the morning and two in the evening. The mind worked with great illumination and power. At that time I used to write poetry. Usually I wrote five to eight or ten lines per day, about two hundred lines in a month. After the *Pranayama* I could write two hundred lines within half an hour. Formerly my memory was dull, but afterwards when the inspiration came, I could remember the lines in their order and write them down conveniently at any time. Along with this enhanced mental activity I could see an electric energy all around the brain.”³¹

Speaking on another occasion, he observes : “Some remarkable results came with it. First, I felt a sort of electricity all around me. Secondly, there were some visions of a minor kind. Thirdly, I began to have a very rapid flow of poetry. Formerly I used to write with difficulty. For a time the flow would increase, then again it would dry up. Now it revived with astonishing vigour and I could write both prose and poetry at tremendous speed. This flow has never ceased up to now (1939). If I have not written much afterwards, it was because I had something else to do. But the moment I want to write, it is there. Fourthly, it was at the time of *Pranayama* practice that I began to put on flesh. Earlier I was very thin. My skin also began to be smooth and fair and there was a peculiar new substance in the saliva, owing to which these changes were probably taking place. Another curious thing I noticed was that whenever I used to sit for *Pranayama*, not a single mosquito would bite me, though plenty of mosquitoes were humming round. I took more and more to *Pranayama*; but there were no further results. It was during this time that I adopted a vegetarian diet. That gave lightness and some purification.”

His practice of Pranayama, however, became irregular after he went to Bengal and got immersed in political work. “As a result I had a serious illness which nearly carried me off. I was at my wits’ end. I did not know how to proceed farther and was searching for some guidance. Then I met Lele.”³²

We will come to Lele later. To resume the thread of the narrative: Sri Aurobindo mentions that he came into contact with a Naga Sannyasi. He told him that he wanted power for revolutionary activities. The

Sannyasi gave a mantra (or *Stotra*, prayer) of Kali with refrain, *jahi, jahi* and conducted some kriyas, rituals, and a Vedic Yajna, sacrifice. But nothing came of it.

Sri Aurobindo seems to have visited a number of Ashrams on the banks of the river Narmada in company with his friend K. G. Deshpande and others. On one of these visits (1903) he had *darshan*, (audience) of Swami Brahmananda of Karnali near Chandod. When people offered him pranam, prostrations, while leaving, the Swami usually kept his eyes closed. When, however, Sri Aurobindo offered his pranam and looked up, he found Brahmananda gazing at him with his eyes fully open—"very beautiful eyes," describes Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo has more things to say of this remarkable yogi: "It is known however that he lived on the banks of the Narmada for 80 years and when he arrived there, he was already in appearance at the age when maturity turns toward overripeness. He was when I met him just before his death a man of magnificent physique showing no signs of old age except white beard and hair, extremely tall, robust, able to walk any number of miles a day tiring out his younger disciples, walking too so swiftly they tended to fall behind, a great head and magnificent face that seemed to belong to men of more ancient times. He never spoke of his age or of his past either except for an occasional almost accidental utterance. One of these was spoken to a disciple of his well known to me a Baroda Sardar, Mazumdar. Mazumdar learned that he was suffering from a bad tooth and brought him a bottle of Floriline, a toothwash then much in vogue. The Yogi refused saying, 'I never use medicines. My one medicine is Narmada water. As for the tooth I have suffered from it since the days of Bhao Girdi.' Bhao Girdi was the Maratha General Sadashiv Rao Bhao who disappeared in the Battle of Panipat (14.1.1761) and his body was never found. Many formed the conclusion that Brahmananda was himself Bhao Girdi but this was an imagination. Nobody who knew Brahmananda would doubt any statement of his—he was a man of perfect simplicity and truthfulness and did not seek fame or to impose himself. When he died he was still in full strength and his death came not by decay but by the accident of blood-poisoning through a rusty nail that entered into his foot as he walked on the sands of the Narmanda."³³

On one occasion Sri Aurobindo visited a temple of Kali on the river bank. He was there at the instance of his friends, he himself not having any faith in idols or image worship. 'With my Europeanised mind I had no faith in image-worship and I hardly believed in the presence of God.' But when he looked at the image, he found there a living Presence of the Divinity. And "for the first time I believed in the presence of God."³⁴ He was to write later: "Or you stand before a temple of Kali beside a sacred river and see what?—a sculpture, a gracious piece of architecture, but in a moment mysteriously, unexpectedly there is instead a Presence, a Power, a Face that looks into yours, an inner sight in you has regarded the World-Mother."³⁵

He recalls the experience in a sonnet³⁶ (written in 1939):

THE STONE GODDESS

In a town of gods, housed in a little shrine,
 From sculptured limbs the Godhead looked at me,—
 A living Presence deathless and divine,
 A Form that harboured all infinity.
 The great World-Mother and her mighty will
 Inhabited the earth's abysmal sleep,
 Voiceless, omnipotent, inscrutable,
 Mute in the desert and the sky and deep,
 Now veiled with mind she dwells and speaks no word,
 Voiceless, inscrutable, omniscient,
 Hiding until our soul has been, has heard
 The secret of her strange embodiment,
 One in the worshipper and the immobile shape,
 A beauty and mystery flesh or stone can drape.

In 1906, Sri Aurobindo visited Chandod, after Brahmananda's passing away and met his successor.

Mrinalini Letters

QUITE ANOTHER SIDE of Sri Aurobindo is revealed in a long letter he wrote to his wife, Mrinalini in August 1905, in the midst of his preoccupation with his official duties at Baroda, his literary pursuits, political preparations in Bengal and elsewhere and his growing involvement in spiritual practices. This remarkable epistle and two others reproduced here in these pages would not have seen the light of the day if the police had not seized them during their search of Sri Aurobindo's residence at the time of his arrest prior to the Alipore Bomb case and produced them in the court. They show how keenly aware he is of the disappointment and the sense of neglect the young wife has been feeling; he describes the compelling factors that have made his life what it is; he explains the God-sanctioned basis of their mutual relationship, their duties and responsibilities; he expresses his deep concern for her; he speaks of his 'three madresses' which were to become famous later in history.

Originally written in Bengali they are reproduced here in their English rendering:

Aug. 30, 1905

Dearest Mrinalini

I have received your letter of the 24th August. I am sorry to learn that the same affliction has fallen once more upon your parents. You have not written which of the boys has passed away from here. But then what can be done if the affliction comes? This is a world in which when you seek happiness, you find grief in its heart, sorrow always clinging to joy. That rule touches not only the desire of children, but all worldly desires. To offer, with a quiet heart, all happiness and grief at the feet of God is the only remedy...

Now I will write the other thing of which I spoke before. I think you have understood by now that the man with whose fate yours has been linked is a man of a very unusual character. Mine is not the same field of action, the same purpose in life, the same mental attitude as that of the people of today in this country. I am in every respect different from them and out of the ordinary, Perhaps you know what ordinary men say of an extraordinary view, an extraordinary endeavour, an extraordinary ambition. To them it is madness; only, if the madman is successful in his work then he is called no longer a madman, but a great genius. But how many are successful in their life's endeavour? Among a thousand men, there are five or six who are out of the ordinary and out of the five or six one perhaps successful. Not to speak of success, I have not yet even entirely entered my field of work. There is nothing then for you but to consider me mad. And it is an evil thing for a woman to fall into the hands of a mad fellow. For woman's expectations are all bound up in worldly happiness and sorrow. A madman will not make his wife happy, he can only make her miserable.

The founders of the Hindu religion understood this very well. They loved extraordinary characters, extraordinary endeavours, extraordinary ambitions Madman or genius, they respected the extraordinary man. But all this means a terrible plight for the wife, and how could the difficulty be solved? The sages fixed upon this solution; they told the woman, "Know that the only mantra for womankind is this: 'The husband is the supreme guru.' The wife shares the dharma (law of conduct) of her husband. She must help him, counsel him, encourage him in whatever work he accepts as his dharma, She should regard him as her god, take joy in his joy and feel sorrow in his unhappiness. It is for a man to choose his works; the woman's part is to give help and encouragement."

Now, the point is this. Are you going to choose the path of the Hindu religion or follow the ideal of the new culture? Your marriage to a madman, is the result of bad karma in your previous lives. It is good to come to terms with one's fate, but what sort of terms will they be? Will you also dismiss your husband as a madman on the strength of what other people think? A madman is bound to run after his mad ways. You cannot hold him back; his nature is stronger than yours. Will you then do nothing but sit in a corner and weep? Or, will you run along with him; try to be the mad wife of this madman, like the queen of the

blind king who played the part of a blind woman by putting a bandage across her eyes? For all your education in a Brahmo school, you are still a woman from a Hindu home. The blood of Hindu ancestors flows in your veins. I have no doubt you will choose the latter course.

I have three madnesses. The first one is this. I firmly believe that the accomplishments, genius, higher education and learning and wealth that God has given me are His. I have a right to spend for my own purposes only what is needed for the maintenance of the family and is otherwise absolutely essential. The rest must be returned to God. If I spend everything for myself, for my pleasure and luxury, I am a thief. The Hindu scriptures say that one who receives wealth from God and does not give it back to Him is a thief. So far, I have given two annas to God and used the other fourteen annas for my own pleasure; this is the way I have settled the account, remaining engrossed in worldly pleasures. Half my life has been wasted—even the beast finds fulfilment in stuffing his own belly and his family's and catering to their happiness.

I have realised that I have been acting all this time as an animal and a thief. Now I realise this and am filled with remorse and disgusted with myself. No more of all this. I renounce this sin once and for all. What does giving to God mean? It means to spend on good works. The money I gave to Usha or to Sarojini causes me no regret. To help others is a sacred duty. But the account is not settled by giving only to one's brothers and sisters. In these dark days the whole country is seeking refuge at my door. I have three hundred million brothers and sisters in this country. Many of them are dying of starvation and the majority just manage to live, racked by sorrow and suffering. They too must be helped.

What do you say, will you come along with me and share my ideal in this respect? We will eat and dress like ordinary men, buying only what is truly needed and offering the rest to God: this is what I propose to do. My purpose can be fulfilled, once you give your approval, once you are able to accept the sacrifice. You have been saying, "I have made no progress." Here I have shown you a path towards progress. Will you take this path?

My second madness has only recently seized me. It is this: by whatever means I must have the direct vision of God. Religion these days means repeating the name of God at any odd hour, praying in

public, showing off how pious one is. I want nothing of this. If God exists, there must be some way to experience His existence, to meet Him face to face. However arduous this path is, I have made up my mind to follow it. The Hindu religion declares that the way lies in one's own body, in one's own mind. It has laid down the rules for following the way, and I have begun to observe them. Within a month I have realised that what the Hindu religion says is not false. I am experiencing in myself the signs of which it speaks. Now I want to take you along this way. You will not be able to keep step with me, for you do not have the requisite knowledge. But there is nothing to prevent you from following behind me. All can attain perfection on this path, but to enter it depends on one's own will. Nobody can drag you onto it. If you consent to this, I shall write more about it.

My third madness is that while others look upon their country as an inert piece of matter—a few meadows and fields, forests and hills and rivers—I look upon my country as the Mother. I adore Her, I worship Her as the Mother. What would a son do if a demon sat on his mother's breast and started sucking her blood? Would he quietly sit down to his dinner, amuse himself with his wife and children, or would he rush out to deliver his mother? I know I have the strength to deliver this fallen race. It is not physical strength,—I am not going to fight with sword or gun,—but the strength of knowledge. The power of the Kshatriya is not the only one; there is also the power of the Brahmin, the power that is founded on knowledge. This feeling is not new in me, it is not of today. I was born with it, it is in my very marrow. God sent me to earth to accomplish this great mission. The seed began to sprout when I was fourteen; by the time I was eighteen the roots of the resolution had grown firm and unshakeable. After listening to what my aunt said, you formed the idea that some wicked people had dragged your simple and innocent husband onto the bad path. But it was this innocent husband of yours who brought those people and hundreds of others onto that path—be it bad or good—and will yet bring thousands and thousands of others onto that same path. I do not say that the work will be accomplished during my lifetime, but it certainly will be done.

Now I ask you, what are you going to do in this connection? The wife is the *Shakti*, the strength of her husband. Will you be Usha's disciple and go on repeating the mantras of Sahib-worship? Will you diminish the strength of your husband by indifference or redouble it by

your sympathy and encouragement? You will say, "What can an ordinary woman like me do in these great matters? I have no strength of mind, no intelligence, I am afraid to think about these things." But there is an easy way out. Take refuge in God. Enter once the path of God-realisation; He will soon make good your deficiencies. Fear gradually leaves one who takes refuge in God. And if you can put your trust in me, if you can listen to me alone and not to all and sundry, I can give you my own strength; that will not diminish my strength but increase it. We say that the wife is the husband's *Shakti*, his strength. This means that the husband's strength is redoubled when he sees his own image in his wife and hears an echo of his own high aspirations in her.

Will you remain like this for ever: "I shall put on fine clothes, have nice things to eat, laugh and dance and enjoy all the pleasures?" Such an attitude cannot be called progress. At the present time the life of women in this country has taken this narrow and contemptible form. Give up all this and follow after me. We have come to this world to do God's work; let us begin it.

You have one defect in your nature. You are much too simple. You listen to anything anyone might say. Thus your mind is for ever restless, your intelligence cannot develop, you cannot concentrate on any work. This has to be corrected. You must acquire knowledge by listening to one person only. You must have a single aim and accomplish your work with a resolute mind. You must ignore the calumny and the ridicule of others and hold fast to your devotion.

There is another defect, not so much of your personal nature, as of the times. The times are such in Bengal that people are incapable of listening to serious things in a serious manner. Religion, philanthropy, noble aspirations, high endeavour, the deliverance of the country, all that is serious, all that is high and noble is turned to ridicule. People want to laugh everything away. At your Brahma school, you picked up a little of this fault. Bari also had it; all of us are tainted by this defect to some extent. It has grown in surprising measure among the people of Deoghar. This attitude must be rejected with a firm mind. You will be able to do it easily. And once you get into the habit of thinking, your true nature will blossom forth. You have a natural turn towards doing good for others and towards self-sacrifice. The one thing you lack is strength of mind. You will get that through worship of God.

This is the secret of mine I wanted to tell you. Do not divulge it to anybody. Ponder calmly over these matters. There is nothing to be frightened of, but there is much to think about. To start with, you need do nothing but meditate on the Divine each day for half an hour, expressing to Him an ardent desire in the form of a prayer. The mind will get prepared gradually. This is the prayer you are to make to Him: "May I not be an obstacle in the path of my husband's life, his aim, his endeavour to realise God. May I always be his helper and his instrument." Will you do this?

Yours

December 6, 1907

Dear Mrinalini

I received your letter the day before yesterday. The shawl was sent the very same day. I do not understand why you did not get it...

Here [in Calcutta] I do not have a moment to spare. I am in charge of the writing; I am in charge of the Congress work; I have to settle the *Bande Mataram* affair. I am finding it difficult to cope with it all. Besides, I have my own work to do; that too cannot be neglected.

Will you listen to one request of mine? This is a time of great anxiety for me. There are pulls from every side that are enough to drive one mad. If at this time you also get restless, it can only increase my worry and anxiety. But if you could write encouraging and comforting letters, that would give me great strength. I should then be able to overcome all fears and dangers with a cheerful heart. I know it is hard for you to live alone at Deoghar. But if you keep your mind firm and have faith, your sorrows will not be able to overwhelm you to such an extent. As you have married me, this kind of sorrow is inevitable for you. Occasional separations cannot be avoided, for, unlike the ordinary Bengali, I cannot make the happiness of family and relatives my primary aim in life. Under these circumstances there is no way out for you except to consider my ideal as your ideal and find your happiness in the success of my appointed work. One thing more. Many of those with whom you are living at present are our elders. Do not get angry with them even if they say harsh or unfair things. And do not believe everything they say is what they mean or is intended to hurt you. Words

often come out in anger, without thought. It is no good holding on to them. If you find it absolutely impossible to stay on, I shall tell Girish Babu; your grandfather can come and stay with you while I am at the Congress.

I am going to Midnapur today, On my return I shall make the necessary arrangements here, and then proceed to Surat. That will probably be on the 15th or 16th. I shall be back on the 2nd of January.

Yours

23 Scott's Lane
Calcutta
Feb. 17, 1908

Dear Mrinalini

I have not written to you for a long time. This is my eternal failing; if you do not pardon me out of your own goodness, what shall I do? What is ingrained in one does not go out in a day. Perhaps it will take me the whole of this life to correct this fault.

I was to have come on the 8th January, but I could not. This did not happen of my own accord. I had to go where God took me. This time I did not go for my own work; it was on His work that I went. The state of my mind has undergone a change. But of this I shall not speak in this letter. Come here, and I shall tell you what is to be told. But there is only one thing which must be said now, and that is that from now on I no longer am the master of my own will. Like a puppet I must go wherever God takes me; like a puppet I must do whatever He makes me do. It will be difficult for you to grasp the meaning of these words just now. But it is necessary to inform you, otherwise my movements may cause you regret and sorrow. You may think that in my work I am neglecting you, but do not do so. Already, I have done you many wrongs and it is but natural that this should have displeased you. But I am no longer free. From now on you will have to understand that all I do depends not on my will but is done at the command [*adesa*] of God. When you come here, you will understand the meaning of my words. I hope that God will show you the Light he has shown me in his infinite Grace. But that depends upon His Will. If you wish to share my life and ideal you must strive to your utmost so that, on the strength of your

ardent desire, He may in His Grace reveal the path to you also. Do not let anyone see this letter, for what I have said is extremely secret. I have not spoken about this to anyone but you; I am forbidden to do so. This much for today.

Your husband

Also of interest regarding this side of his life, will be an extract from a letter of his to his father-in-law (dated June 8, 1906):

“I am afraid I shall never be good for much in the way of domestic virtues. I have tried, very ineffectively, to do some part of my duty as a son, a brother and a husband, but there is something too strong in me which forces me to subordinate everything else to it. Of course that is no excuse for my culpability in not writing letters,—a fault I am afraid I shall always be quicker to admit than to reform. I can easily understand that to others it may seem to spring from a lack of the most ordinary affection. It was not so in the case of my father from whom I seem to inherit the defect. In all my fourteen years in England I hardly got a dozen letters from him, and yet I cannot doubt his affection for me since it was the false report of my death which killed him. I fear you must take me as I am with all my imperfections on my head.”³⁷

Bhawani Mandir

IN THE HECTIC days preceding the partition of Bengal, Sri Aurobindo wrote in detail on the scheme of Bhawani Mandir. Thousands of copies were printed and circulated. It caused and spread fear in the officialdom, while it inspired many an ardent youth. Though the idea was Barin's, it was Sri Aurobindo who gave a form to it. It envisages building of a temple to Mother Bhawani where workers for the liberation of the motherland are to dedicate themselves totally as karma-yogins, in a spirit of total renunciation. Others who could not thus renounce, were to be of help to them.

Sri Aurobindo wrote that Bhawani is the Infinite Energy or Shakti and that a nation is Shakti of its millions. For want of Shakti, India was failing and hence worship of Shakti was needed for her revival. The need for such a rebirth of India was all the more important because it was demanded by the Future of the World. For this he emphasised the necessity for *Bhakti*-adoration of the Mother, the Shakti, *Karma*-work for the Mother through a new order of Brahmacharins and Jnana-knowledge, the basis of which is the *so-aham* of the Vedanta, which when vivified by Karma and Bhakti will deliver man out of all fear and weakness. The Order of Sannyasis would combine all the above and work for the people and the motherland.

This booklet, issued anonymously, drew the special attention of the Government authorities as is evidenced by the confidential report of Mr. Denham, the Superintendent of Police, Special Branch, Calcutta, in which he writes:

“Bhawani Mandir was nothing but a gigantic scheme for establishing a central religions Society, outwardly religious but in spirit, energy and work political. From this centre missionaries well-versed in religious-political argument were to go on their wanderings over India, to form fresh centres and gain fresh recruits. The argument in the pamphlet is

ingenious and when examined shows that extraordinary adroitness with which its author has misinterpreted the Vedantist ideas for his own purposes, and to adorn his talk and point his moral.”

Further, “The pamphlet Bhawani Mandir is but a clear forerunner of the far stronger meat which was served up on the *Yugantar*. One can trace throughout the history of the *Yugantar* the cry of Shakti—the want of power and how to obtain power”³⁸

As a postscript we might add a remark of Sri Aurobindo on the aftermath: “The idea of Bhawani Mandir simply lapsed of itself. Sri Aurobindo thought no more about it, but Barin who clung to the idea tried to establish something like it on a small scale in the Manicktola Garden (Calcutta).”³⁹

Gathering Storm

THERE WERE COUNTRYWIDE meetings—as many as two thousand of them to protest against the proposed partition of Bengal. A meeting was held in Baroda in the month of September, 1905. Sri Aurobindo attended it but did not speak at it as he was still in service.

Twice during that year he met Charu Chandra Dutt, I.C.S. at Thana. It was at his residence that he came to know Raja Subodh Mullick, brother-in-law of Dutt. Both Sri Aurobindo and Mullick developed friendship and good understanding on political matters. Subodh Mullick was later to give strong support to Sri Aurobindo in his political campaign.

Sri Aurobindo attended the Banaras session of the Congress (December 1905) without openly participating in the Proceedings. He contacted and briefed prominent leaders from Bengal and other provinces. Gokhale, the President of the Congress, being a moderate, would not accept the policies of the Nationalists (as the revolutionaries called themselves); the utmost he would accept was the gospel of Swadeshi and the policy of Boycott in Bengal only.

The Swadeshi and Boycott gathered momentum and caught the public imagination. A book in Bengali, *Deshar Katha*, by a Maharashtrian writer Deuskar, at this time caused a sensation by its systematic exposure of the British exploitation of India, industrially and otherwise. It had so many repercussions that the Government banned it from circulation.

Sri Aurobindo took privilege leave from February 19, 1906 in order to participate in the agitation in Bengal. He returned to Baroda in June, only to take one year's leave without pay from June 18, 1906 and go back to Bengal.

Events started happening in rapid succession. Thus the declaration of the *Yugantar*, a Bengali Weekly, to serve as the organ of the

revolutionary movement was filed on March 12, 1906, Barin was intimately associated with this fiery paper and Sri Aurobindo contributed the first few articles to it. Among other brilliant writers on the staff was Abinash Bhattacharya. Bhupendranath Datta (brother of Swami Vivekananda), a young revolutionary was also on the staff. Its policy was to promote open revolt against the British rule and guerilla warfare in the countryside.

The message of *Yugantar* spread like wild fire; priced one pice per copy, its circulation shot up from one thousand to twenty thousand a week. The demand always went beyond the managerial capacity of the organisers.

The famous Barisal conference of the Bengal Provincial Congress was held on April 14, 1906, with Sri Aurobindo attending. The Government declared the meeting illegal and ordered the participants to disperse. But they refused. A procession was taken out to protest against the Government order and in the front row were Sri Aurobindo, Bepin Chandra Pal and B. C. Chatterjee. Delegates to the conference followed. The police appeared on the scene, and after allowing the leaders to pass, they stopped the delegates from going further. The delegates refused to obey and they were lathi-charged, and many were injured.

The conference over, Sri Aurobindo and Bepin Pal toured the districts of East Bengal with a view to observing the conditions and bringing about political awakening among the people. Speaking of those times, Sri Aurobindo recalls: "There was a sudden transformation during the Swadeshi days. Before that people in Bengal used to tremble before an Englishman and then the position was reversed. I remember when I wanted to do political work I visited Bengal and toured the districts of Jessore, Khulna etc. We found the people steeped in pessimism, a black weight of darkness weighing over the whole country. It is difficult nowadays to imagine those times."⁴⁰

However, effective propaganda and intensive work by the revolutionary groups bore fruit and the atmosphere underwent a marked change. It had been prohibited to shout *Bande Mataram* in the open streets, but the people took it up as a war-cry and filled the air with full-throated chants of the two magic words. Sri Aurobindo describes: "It was thirty-two years ago that Bankim wrote this great song and few

listened; but in a sudden moment somebody sang Bande Mataram. The mantra had been given and in a single day a whole people had been converted to the religion of patriotism. The Mother had revealed herself. Once that vision has come to a people, there can be no rest, no further slumber till the temple has been made ready, the image installed and sacrifice offered. A great nation which has had that vision can never again bend its neck in subjection to the yoke of a conqueror."⁴¹

Political

CALCUTTA (1906–1910)

Bengal National College

SRI AUROBINDO ARRIVED in Calcutta in July 1906 to begin what was to prove the most hectic period of his life. He took up residence, at first with Raja Subodh Mullick, and after a few months moved to a separate house where Mrinalini and his sister Sarojini joined him.

Sri Aurobindo had been seriously concerned with the harmful effects of the type of education given by the British system in schools, colleges and universities. He had first hand experience of it during his professorship at Baroda and, in fact, he had made pointed mention of these drawbacks in his writings and speeches. To reorganise the whole system of education on national lines was one of the planks in his revolutionary programme. He aimed at a pattern of education that was soul oriented and had relevance to the needs of the country. Raja Subodh Mullick came forward with a donation of a lakh of rupees for starting a Bengal National College; he made only one condition and that was that Sri Aurobindo should be offered a teaching position on a salary of Rs. 150 p.m. Though this was just one-fifth of the salary he was drawing in Baroda, Sri Aurobindo accepted the proposal. The management of the institution was left in the hands of Satish Chandra Mukherjee of the Dawn Society which had been founded in 1902 and was being run by him for giving a spiritual direction to education. He was instrumental in the formation of the National Council of Education in 1906 after the partition and it was under the auspices of this Council that the new College was started.

Sri Aurobindo joined as Principal when the Bengal National College was opened on August 14, 1906. Among his contemporaries were Dr. Radha Kumud Mookerji and Pramatha Nath Mukhopadhyaya ((later Swami Pratyagatmananda). He was the idol of the students. He not only taught them, but also inspired them by his example. He told the

student community: "When we established this college, and left other occupations, other chances of life, to devote our lives to this institution, we did so because we hoped to see in it the foundation, the nucleus of a nation, of the new India which is to begin its career after this night of sorrow and trouble, on that day of glory and greatness when India will work for the world. What we want here is not merely to give you a little information, not merely to open to you careers for earning a livelihood, but to build up sons for the Motherland to work and to suffer for her... There are times in a nation's history when Providence places before it one work, one aim, to which everything else, however high and noble in itself, has to be sacrificed. Such a time has now arrived for our Motherland when nothing is dearer than her service, when everything else is to be directed to that end. If you will study, study for her sake; train yourself body and mind and soul for her service work that she may prosper. Suffer that she may rejoice. All is contained in that one single advice."¹

Sri Aurobindo, however, resigned from his post when he was first prosecuted in the *Bande Mataram* case in August 1907 so as not to embarrass the institution. But he rejoined as a professor in September when the case against him failed. He finally severed his connections following his arrest (on May 2, 1908) in connection with the Bomb case. He sent his resignation from Alipore Jail.

It is to be recorded here, however, that he was not satisfied with the way the educational policy was carried out in practice. He felt the change was only on the surface and things were drifting very much along the same old lines. He could not get the other members of the Council to go along with him. He wrote: "National Education languishes because the active force has been withdrawn from it; it does not absolutely perish because a certain amount of Nationalist self-devotion has entrenched itself in this last stronghold and holds it against great odds and under the most discouraging circumstances. The National Council of Education, as it is at present composed, has convicted itself of entire incapacity whether to grasp the meaning of the movement or to preserve or create the conditions of its success. To the majority of the members it is merely an interesting academical experiment in which they can

embody some of their pet hobbies or satisfy a general vague dissatisfaction with the established University system. To others the only valuable part of it is the technical instruction given in its workshops. The two or three who at all regard it as part of a great national movement, are unnerved by fear, scepticism and distrust and, by introducing the principles of Chanakya into its public policy, are depriving it of the first condition of its continued existence...Unless this movement is carried on, as it was undertaken, as part of a great movement of national resurgence, unless it is made, visibly to all, a nursery of patriotism and a mighty instrument of national culture, it cannot succeed.”²

Though Sri Aurobindo did not have occasion to develop his philosophy of Education, an idea of the principles of his thinking on the subject can be gathered from his subsequent writings in the *Karmayogin*.

According to Sri Aurobindo, the central principle of education is : “Every one has in him something divine, something his own, a chance of perfection and strength in however small a sphere which God offers him to take or refuse. The task is to find it, develop it and use it. The chief aim of education should be to help the growing soul to draw out that in itself which is best and make it perfect for a noble use.”

He enunciates: “The first principle of true teaching is that nothing can be taught. The teacher is not an instructor or taskmaster, he is a helper and a guide. His business is to suggest and not to impose.

“The second principle is that the mind has to be consulted in its own growth. The idea of hammering the child into the shape desired by the parent or teacher is a barbarous and ignorant superstition. It is he himself who must be induced to expand in accordance with his own nature.

“The third principle of education is to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be. The basis of a man’s nature is almost always, in addition to his soul’s past, his heredity, his surroundings, his nationality, his country, the soil from which he draws his sustenance, the air which he breathes, the sights, the sounds, habits to which he is accustomed.”³

He explains further: "To bring out the real man is the first business of education. It can be done by promoting powers of observation, memory, reasoning etc. Through these the man within must be touched and brought out. The second thing that acts is the personality of the teacher. The teacher may not directly guide or instruct but the influence keeps the children engaged. The third thing is to place a man in the right place in the world."⁴

It may be noted that Sri Aurobindo follows very much the same principles in his Yoga. The sadhaka is given full freedom to grow at his own pace, in his own way; the Teacher teaches not so much by precept as by example. He builds and shapes by an inner influence rather than by an external discipline.

Bande Mataram

A KEEN NEED was felt among the revolutionary section, particularly during this period of intense emotional opposition to the Partition, to have an organ in English as effective as the *Yugantar* in Bengali. And on August 6, 1906 a declaration of the *Bande Mataram* was filed. None can give a more accurate account of this event of far-reaching consequence than Sri Aurobindo himself who was the one most involved. He writes:

“Bipin Pal started the *Bande Mataram* with Rs. 500 in his pocket donated by Haridas Halder. He called in my help as assistant editor and I gave it. I called a private meeting of the young Nationalist leaders in Calcutta and they agreed to take up the *Bande Mataram* as their party paper with Subodh and Nirod Mullick as the principal financial supporters. A company was projected and formed, but the paper was financed and kept up meanwhile by Subodh. Bipin Pal who was strongly supported by C. R. Das and others remained as editor. Hemendra Prasad Ghose and Shyam Sunder joined the editorial staff but they could not get on with Bipin Babu and were supported by the Mullicks. Finally, Bipin Pal had to retire, I don't remember whether in November or December, Probably the latter. I was myself very ill, almost to death, in my father-in-law's house in Serpentine Lane and I did not know what was going on. They put my name as editor on the paper without my consent, but I spoke to the secretary pretty harshly and had the insertion discontinued. I also wrote a strong letter on the subject to Subodh. From that time Bipin Pal had no connection with the *Bande Mataram*. Somebody said that he resumed his editorship after I was arrested in the Alipore Case. I never heard of that. I was told by Bejoy Chatterjee after I came out from jail, that he, Shyam Sundar and Hemendra Prasad had carried on somehow with the paper but the finances became impossible, so he deliberately wrote an article which made the Government come down on the paper and stop its publication, so that the *Bande Mataram* might end with some eclat and in all honour.”⁵

To oppose violence with violence, to expose and resist injustice, to refuse to submit to oppression, to eliminate pockets of treachery and perfidy, to promote Boycott and Swadeshi — these were the basic planks for the policy of *Bande Mataram*.

A change in the management took place at the instance of Sri Aurobindo in October. *Bande Mataram* became a joint stock company with a board of directors. The actual editor was Sri Aurobindo but he functioned under the cover of the board who bore the responsibility. This made it difficult for the Government to prosecute any single individual. Anyone from the board could own the responsibility and face prosecution. This enabled the editor (Sri Aurobindo) to continue his work uninterrupted. And Sri Aurobindo carried on with an expertise that drew the admiration of even the enemy. The Anglo-Indian press complained that his writings reeked with sedition but were so cleverly worded that they remained within the limits of the law. Mr. Ratcliffe, the then editor of the Statesman (Calcutta) wrote in a letter to the *Manchester Guardian* (on December 26, 1950):

“We know Aurobindo Ghosh only as a revolutionary nationalist and editor of a flaming newspaper which struck a ringing new note in Indian journalism. It was in 1906, shortly after Curzen’s retirement, that Sri Aurobindo and his friends started *Bande Mataram* (Hail to the Mother). It had a full-size sheet, was clearly printed on green paper, and was full of leading and special articles written in English with a brilliance and pungency not hitherto attained in the Indian press. It was the most effective voice of what we called nationalist extremism.”

B. C. Pal, the founder himself paid a tribute to Sri Aurobindo: “The hand of the master was in it from the very beginning. Its bold attitude, its vigorous thinking, its clear ideas, its chaste and powerful diction, its scorching sarcasm and refined witticism, were unsurpassed by any journal in the country, either Indian or Anglo-Indian...morning after morning, not only Calcutta but the educated community almost in every part of the country eagerly awaited its vigorous pronouncements on the stirring questions of the day...Long extracts from it began to be reproduced in the exclusive columns of the *Times* of London. It was a force in the country which none dared to ignore, however much they might fear or hate it; and Aravinda was the leading spirit, the central figure, in the new journal.”⁶

And when the *Times* complained that these nationalists were spreading racial hatred and disaffection against the ruling race, the *Bande Mataram* replied:

“Our motives and our objects are at least as lofty and noble as those of Mazzini or those of Garibaldi whose centenary the *Times* was hymning with such fervour a few days ago. The restoration of our country to her separate existence as a nation among the nations, her exaltation to a greatness, splendour, strength, magnificence equalling and surpassing ancient glories is the goal of our endeavours: and we have undertaken this arduous task in which we as individuals risk everything, ease, wealth, liberty, life itself it may be, not out of hatred and hostility to other nations but in the firm conviction that we are working as much in the interests of all humanity, including England herself, as in those of our own posterity and nation. That the struggle to realise our ideal must bring with it temporary strife, misunderstanding, hostility, disturbance—that, in short, it is bound to be a struggle and not the billing and cooling of political doves, we have never attempted to deny. We believe that the rule of three hundred millions of Indians by an alien bureaucracy not responsible to the nation is a symptom unnatural, intrinsically bad and inevitably oppressive, and we do not pretend that we can convince our people of its undesirability without irritating the bureaucracy on one side and generating a strong dislike of the existing system on the other. But our object is constructive and not destructive, to build up our own nation and not to destroy another. If England chooses to feel aggrieved by our nation-building, and obstruct it by unjust, violent or despotic means, it is she who is the aggressor and guilty of exciting our hatred and ill feeling.”⁷

Sri Aurobindo wrote straight on the copy to the press—on one occasion he wrote on the back of a packing paper and gave it forthwith to the compositor who had called for the matter and not a comma needed to be changed. He covered an incredible range of themes—current, historical, political, social cultural and invested issues of the day with high philosophical and spiritual overtones but always kept his feet firm on the ground hitting hard with fact and argument.

Many of these writings were reproduced or translated in local languages and published all over the country. Mention may be made here of a series of articles (seven in number) on the Doctrine of Passive Resistance that appeared from April 11, to April 23, 1907. His colleagues

too were all gifted with the pen and shyam Sundar particularly picked up Sri Aurobindo's style so well that it was difficult at times not to mistake his articles for Sri Aurobindo's. In his History of the Freedom Movement in India, R. C. Majumdar quotes from J. L. Banerjee's tribute: "Whoever the actual contributor to the *Bande Mataram* might be—the soul, the genius of the paper was Arabinda. The pen might be that of Shyam Sundar or whoever else. but the voice was the voice of Arabinda Ghose."

Sri Aurobindo serialised his play, *Perseus the Deliverer* in the columns of the *Bande Mataram* from June 30, to October 13, 1907.

Such of these articles as could be recovered and identified (some of them by referring to Sri Aurobindo himself during his later years) have been collected and published now in the 900-page Volume One of the Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library, under the title *Bande Mataram*. They make history living and bring before the eye the rapidly changing scenario of those days, the personalities that strode the country and the way in which the pen proved mightier than the sword.

The *Bande Mataram* which began as a Daily on August 7, 1906, also became a Weekly from June 2, 1907 and both continued till October 29, 1908 which was the last date of its issue.

Calcutta Congress Session: Swaraj

ALL THESE PREOCCUPATIONS, educational, editorial and agitational, left little time to Sri Aurobindo for his practice of *Pranayama* which consequently became Irregular and finally stopped. He fell ill and for three months from October 1906 he stayed with Bhupal Chandra Bose, his father-in-law. In December he went to Deoghar for a change and returned to Calcutta in time to attend the Congress Session which began under the presidentship of Dadabhoy Naoroji on 26th December.

Among the Nationalist leaders who were present were Tilak, Lajpat Rai, and Khaparde. Sri Aurobindo had got the Nationalists to accept Tilak as the leader. He worked behind the scenes at the Reception Committee level and of the Working Committee to pass a resolution setting Independence as the goal of the Congress. Further efforts were made at private meetings at the residence of Subodh Mullick under Tilak's leadership; large support adequate enough to ensure acceptance of the resolution at the open session of the Congress was secured. Once this goal was accepted, more planks were added viz. Boycott, Swadeshi, and National Education. Moderates like Sri Phiroz Shah Mehta, Gokhale, Surendranath Banerjee were opposed to the resolution. But the President, Dadabhoy himself, who was not committed at the outset, saw that the resolution had wide support from Bengal and other Provinces and he proceeded to get it accepted. Sri Aurobindo's efforts in forging an understanding between the Nationalist Party and Dadabhoy were thus successful. As a compromise between the 'Independence' of the Nationalists and the lesser objective of the moderates keeping the British connection, the President proposed and got adopted *Swaraj* as the objective of the Congress.

Bande Mataram Case

THE YEAR 1906 was notable also for the contact established between Sri Aurobindo and Rabindranath Tagore. Sri Aurobindo went to the poet's Jorasanko residence to attend a dinner where several prominent persons were present. Tagore too visited the Sanjivani (secret society & journal) office where he met Sri Aurobindo.

During April, 1907 Sri Aurobindo wrote in the *Bande Mataram* a series of articles on Passive Resistance. He declared, with all the strength of the awakened youth power at his elbow "we desire to put an end to petitioning until such a strength is created in the country that a petition will only be a courteous form of demand. We wish to kill utterly the pernicious delusion that a foreign and adverse interest can be trusted to develop us to its own detriment, and entirely to do away with the foolish and ignoble hankering after help from our natural adversaries. Our attitude to bureaucratic concession is that of Laocoon: 'We fear the Greeks even when they bring us gifts.' Our policy is self-development and defensive resistance. But we would extend the policy of self-development to every department of national life; not only Swadeshi and National Education, but national defence, national arbitration courts, sanitation, insurance against famine or relief of famine,—whatever our hands find to do or urgently needs doing, we must attempt ourselves and no longer look to the alien to do it for us. And we would universalise and extend the policy of defensive resistance until it ran parallel on every line with our self-development. Our defensive resistance must be mainly passive in the beginning, although with a perpetual readiness to supplement it with active resistance whenever compelled... We desire to keep our resistance within the bounds of law, so long as law does not seek directly to interfere with us and render impossible our progress and the conscientious discharge of our duty to our fellow countrymen. But if, at any time, laws should be passed with the object of summarily checking our self-development or unduly limiting our rights as men, we

must be prepared to break the law and endure the penalty imposed for the breach with the object of making it unworkable as has been done in other countries. We must equally be ready to challenge by our action arbitrary executive coercion, if we do not wish to see our resistance snuffed out by very cheap official extinguishers. Nor must we shrink from boycotting persons as well as things; we must make full though discriminating use of the social boycott against those of our countrymen who seek to baffle the will of the nation in a matter vital to its emancipation...We advocate passive resistance without wishing to make a dogma of it...Passive resistance may be the final method of salvation in our case or it may be only the preparation for the final sadhana.”⁸

Sri Aurobindo sent in his resignation from Service in Baroda, effective from June 18, 1907.

On 24th July Bhupendranath Dutt., who declared himself as the ‘editor’, was sentenced for sedition in the *Yugantar*. As a revolutionary, he was asked by Sri Aurobindo not to defend himself and thus refuse to recognise the jurisdiction of a foreign court.

The favour of sacrifice for the Motherland was at its fever-pitch. Amarendra Chatterjee describes his initiation into the movement by Sri Aurobindo:

“Sri Aurobindo: ‘I suppose Upen has talked to you about the work that is to be done for the country. I hope there is no doubt or vacillation or fear in your mind about it.’

Amar: ‘Will you not say something yourself?...I want to hear from you. Have you heard anything about me?’

Sri Aurobindo: ‘I have heard about you. You have given a lot of money to the Swadeshi movement...But is the country going to be freed by the politics of salt and sugar only? If we want to secure the freedom of the country, we have to sacrifice everything for it, and we should be ready to give up even our life for it. If we want to free the country, we shall have to conquer the fear of death.’

Amar: ‘How many would be able to do it, you think?’

Sri Aurobindo: ‘Is it so difficult to sacrifice oneself for the Motherland? Men go through so much suffering and trouble to get

happiness in life. No sacrifice should be difficult to make for the freedom of the country. If India does not become free, man also will not be free...'

Amar: 'Upen has told me about being ready to sacrifice myself and I have replied to him, on the basis of what Bankim has said, that as one day death is inevitable, why should one fear it? My fear comes from another quarter. I feel at present that I am not worthy of such a great mission. Is there any means of attaining that fitness?'

Sri Aurobindo: 'Surrender yourself to God and in the name of the Divine Mother get along with the service of India; That is my *diksha* to you'."9

The *Bande Mataram* was getting on the nerves of the Establishment. The Anglo-Indian press was crying itself hoarse for action against this political dynamite. So at last the office of the *Bande Mataram* was searched on July 30, 1907 and a prosecution launched for sedition: some articles from the *Yugantar* in Bengali had been published in their English translation; also a letter to the Editor, 'Politics for Indians.' A warrant for Sri Aurobindo's arrest was issued on 16th August. Sri Aurobindo went and surrendered himself at the Police Station, but was released on bail. When, however, the case began, Bepin Pal who had been cited as the principal witness refused to give evidence and for his heroic act he had to suffer six month's imprisonment. The prosecution could not prove what everyone knew—that Sri Aurobindo was the editor and he was acquitted on September 23, 1907. The Government had to satisfy themselves by sentencing Apurva Bose, the printer of the paper, a man who knew no English and was ignorant of what was being printed!

There was an interesting sequel to this episode. During the trial, anticipating Sri Aurobindo's incarceration, Poet Tagore had written and published his 'Homage to Aurobindo'. After the acquittal he called on Sri Aurobindo, embraced him and exclaimed (in Bengali), "What! You have deceived us!" Sri Aurobindo replied (in English), "Not for long will you have to wait." And indeed it turned out to be so.

To quote a few lines from the *Homage* (translated into English) which ranks among the best inspired utterances during this upheaval:

Rabindranath, O Aurobindo, bows to thee!

O friend, my country's friend, O voice incarnate, free,
 O India's soul! No soft renown doth crown thy lot,
 Nor pelf or careless comfort is for thee; thou'st sought
 No petty bounty, petty dole; the beggar's bowl
 Thou ne'er hast held aloft...
 The fiery messenger that with the lamp of God
 Hath come—where is the king, who can with chain or rod
 Chastise him?...Rabindranath,
 O Aurobindo,
 bows to thee.

The *Bande Mataram* case had, however, a totally different result than what the Government had calculated. Sri Aurobindo who had always preferred to work behind the scene, being of a retiring disposition and shy by nature, suddenly found himself in the forefront of the national stage. All eyes were turned to him; the students, the young men who were swelling the ranks of the Nationalists, the intelligentsia of the country looked to him as the unchallenged leader of the movement.

The identity of the writer of the brilliant editorials was now beyond all doubt. Wrote the *Indian Patriot*:

“At this moment millions of his countrymen are doing homage to his genius. They are pronouncing his name with reverence and gratitude. They honour him, because he honours them, he labours for them. For his country's sake, he counts every suffering a gain. He had dedicated his life to the uplifting of his nation. If the greatness of an individual is to be judged by the richness of the sacrifice made in the cause of freedom and truth, Mr. Ghose is great indeed. Gold and power may not be thine. But thy labour is not lost. Thy courage will live to inspire the race. Thou shalt live not only in marble and gold but in poet's song which is more enduring. Thou art splendidly in the advance of the day.”¹⁰

Henry Nevinston, member of Parliament from England, who interviewed Sri Aurobindo, concludes his account in ‘The New Spirit in India’: “Grave with intensity, careless of fate or opinion, a)nd one of the most silent of men I have known, he was of the stuff that dreamers are made of, but dreamers who act their dreams, indifferent to the means.”

Fateful Surat Split

MIDNAPORE WAS THE stronghold of the Nationalists and when a District Conference was held there from 7 to 9, December, 1907, they naturally congregated in large numbers. There was also a moderate group which invited Surendranath Banerjee and other leaders from Calcutta.

Sri Aurobindo was the leader of the Nationalists. There were, however, bickerings and betrayals of trust by the Moderates led by the President-elect, K. B. Dutt. As a protest, the Nationalists as a body left the Conference, met separately on two days, the first day with Sri Aurobindo in the chair, and passed the original Nationalist resolutions on Swaraj, Swadeshi and Boycott, which the Moderates had sought to whittle down, and forwarded them to the Congress Session at Surat which was to meet from December 26, 1907.

On his way to Surat, Sri Aurobindo broke journey at Nagpur on 22nd December and addressed a public meeting. He recalls how he was surprised to see sitting there in the front row Sir Moropant Joshi, who had taken the revolutionary oath of the 'Lotus and Dagger' while in England but had turned into a leader of the Moderates. Moropant was 'gaping' at him all along!

All knew that the Surat meeting of the Congress would be a decisive one in measuring the strength of the Moderates and the Nationalists. So even a week before the scheduled date, both the parties had started mustering their forces. The Moderates had chosen Surat as they felt they would be in a majority there. The Nationalists were there in their strength with Tilak, Sri Aurobindo, B. C. Chatterjee, Khaparde and others. Members of the Revolutionary party of whom Barin was the principal spokesman were also there pooling their strength.

The gauntlet had been thrown already in the *Bande Mataram* (recalling the words of the Hungarin hero, Kossuth):

“He told them, ‘With you, if choose, but without you, or against you, if it must be.’ We also say the same to all who threaten to desert us in such a critical hour.”

Before the open Session started, Surendranath Banerjee, the Moderate leader of Bengal called a meeting of all delegates from Bengal for taking common counsel. But his terms for agreement with the Nationalists were torally unacceptable to the latter and the meeting fizzled out.

Sir Phirozshah Mehta, Gokhle and other Moderate leaders became doubtful of a majority to have their way. The main point of contention was the resolution on Swaraj with the programme of Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education passed at the previous Session in Calcutta (1906). The Moderates did not want to accept it in that form; the Nationalists insisted that it be taken as the basis for further action. The Moderates had also a plan to get adopted a new constitution which would have enabled them to keep control of the Congress for many years more. They were sure of their majority in the Reception Committee; knowing it, the Nationalists planned to bring the resolution before the open session. Both the parties proceeded to test their strength in the election of the President of the Session. Surendrenath Banerjee proposed Dr. Rash Behari Ghose; Tilak put forward the name of Lajpat Rai. But when Tilak stood up to speak, he was prevented from doing so and there was an uproar which spread into a pandemonium. Different accounts have appeared of the incidents which thus led to a parting between the Moderates and the Nationalists, culminating in an open split in that august body, the Indian National Congress. Fortunately we have a first hand account by Sri Aurobindo who was directly involved in the happenings. He recounts:

“The session of the Congress had first been arranged at Nagpur, but Nagpur was predominantly a Mahratta city and violently extremist. Gujarat was at that time predominantly Moderate, there were very few Naitonalists and Surat was a stronghold of Moderatism though afterwards Gujarat became, especially after Gandhi took the lead, one of the most revolutionary of the provinces. So the Moderate leaders decided to hold the Congress at Surat. The Nationalists however came there in strength from, all parts, they held a public conference with Sri Aurobindo as President and for some time it was doubtful which side

would have the majority, but finally in this Moderate city that party was able to bring in a crowd of so-called delegates up to the number of 1300 while the Nationalists were able by the same method to muster something over 1100. It was known that the Moderate leaders had prepared a new constitution for the Congress which would make it practically impossible for the extreme party to command a majority at any annual session for many years to come. The younger Nationalists, especially those from Maharashtra, were determined to prevent this by any means and it was decided by them to break the Congress if they could not swamp it; this decision was unknown to Tilak and the older leaders. But it was known to Sri Aurobindo. At the sessions Tilak went on to the platform to propose a resolution regarding the presidentship of the Congress; the President appointed by the Moderates refused to him the permission to speak, but Tilak insisted on his right and began to read his resolution and speak. There was a tremendous uproar, the young Gujarati volunteers lifted up chairs over the head of Tilak to beat him. At that the Mahrattas became furious, a Mahratta shoe came hurtling across the pavilion aimed at the President, Dr. Rash Behari Ghosh, and hit Surendranath Bajerjee on the shoulder. The young Mahrattas in a body charged up to the platform, the Moderate leaders fled; after a short fight on the platform with chairs, the session broke up not to be resumed. The Moderate leaders decided to suspend the Congress and replace it by a national conference with a constitution and arrangement which would make it safe for their party. Meanwhile, Lajpat Rai came to Tilak and informed him that the Government had decided, if the Congress split, to crush the Extremists by the most ruthless repression. Tilak thought, and the events proved that he was right, that the country was not yet ready to face successfully such a repression and he proposed to circumvent both the Moderate plan and the Government plan by the Nationalists joining the Conference and signing the statement of adherence to the new constitution demanded by the moderates. Sri Aurobindo and some other leaders were opposed to this submission; they did not believe that the Moderates would admit any Nationalists to their conference (and this proved to be the case) and they wanted the country to be asked to face the repression. Thus the Congress ceased for a time to exist; but the Moderate Conference was not a success and was attended only by small and always dwindling number. Sri Aurobindo had hoped that the country would be strong enough to face the repression, at least in Bengal and Maharashtra, where the enthusiasm

had become intense and almost universal; but he thought also that even if there was a temporary collapse the repression would create a deep change in the hearts and minds of the people and the whole nation would swing over to Nationalism and the ideal of Independence. This actually happened and when Tilak returned from jail in Burma after six years, he was able in conjunction with Mrs. Besant not only to revive the Congress but to make it representative of a nation pledged to the Nationalist cause. The Moderate party shrank into a small body of liberals and even these finally subscribed to the ideal of complete independence.”¹¹

Lele and Nirvanic Experience

IT HAS BEEN mentioned how Sri Aurobindo felt himself at a dead end after four years of *Pranayama* despite the wonderful results it produced. He was looking for some help in this direction. At Surat he had occasion to meet Sakhare Baba, known to Barin; he was a yogi who was keenly interested in India's freedom. At this juncture Barin arranged for Sri Aurobindo to meet another Maharashtrian yogi. He was Vishnu Bhaskar Lele of Gwalior, Guru of a friend of Barin. Barin wired to him to go to Baroda, and when Sri Aurobindo left Surat after the breakup of the Congress for Baroda on December 31, 1907, Lele was there. It appears Lele had a premonition when he received the telegram that he was going to give initiation to a very great person.

Sri Aurobindo first met Lele at Khasirao Jadhav's in the first week of January 1908. It was a brief meeting lasting half an hour. He expressed his readiness to help and show results provided. Sri Aurobindo would at least suspend his political activity for some time. Lele wanted him to be alone with him in seclusion. So Sri Aurobindo withdrew from the public scene and remained with the yogi for three days in a small room on the top floor of Sardar Majumdar's building in Baroda. What followed is best described in Sri Aurobindo's own words:

“Sit in meditation,’ he said, ‘but do not think, look only at your mind; you will see thoughts *coming into it*; before they can enter throw these away from your mind till your mind is capable of entire silence.’ I had never heard before of thoughts coming visibly into the mind from outside, but I did not think either of questioning the truth or the possibility, I simply sat down and did it. In a moment my mind became silent as a windless air on a high mountain summit and then I saw one thought and then another coming in a concrete way from outside; I flung them away before they could enter and take hold of brain and in three days I was free. From that moment, in principle, the mental being in me became a free intelligence, a universal Mind, not limited to the narrow

circle of personal thought as a labourer in a thought factory; but a receiver of knowledge from all the hundred realms of being and free to choose what it willed in this vast sight-empire and thought-empire.”¹²

He says, elsewhere: “Lele asked me to silence the mind and throw away the thoughts if they came. I did it—in three days—and the result was that the whole being became quiet and in seven days I got the Nirvanic experience which remained with me for a long time. I could not have got out of it even if I had wanted to. Even afterward this experience remained in background in the midst of all activities.”¹³

One result of this silencing of the mind that “while I was writing for the *Bande Mataram* etc., they (thoughts) didn’t pass through the mind; they either came direct to the pen and I didn’t know before hand what I was writing or they came just like that...sometimes they passed through the mind which was quite passive.”¹⁴

The political activity, however, was not altogether forgotten. During his stay in Baroda, Sri Aurobindo met political workers among whom was Chhotalal Purani. He expounded to him his scheme for revolutionary work. Subsequently Barin also explained to him details of the organisation elsewhere and also gave him the formula for manufacturing bombs. It was at this time that his younger brother, Ambalal Purani who later joined Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry and played an important part in his spiritual mission, came into contact with Sri Aurobindo’s personality through his lectures in the city and decided to join his brother’s group.

The Maharaja wished to meet Sri Aurobindo and they met. But when a second meeting was desired by the ruler, Lele advised against it and it did not come off.

After three lectures in Baroda on the political situation, Sri Aurobindo left for Poona in the second week of January. He took Lele with him. After fulfilling his lecture and other engagements in Poona, both went to Bombay. By this time his Baroda experience of the silent mind had deepened into a Brahman consciousness. Everything was felt to be still and against this background all activity in the busy city around looked like taking place on a cinematographic screen. He says: “When I was in Bombay, from the balcony of a friend’s house I saw the whole busy movement of Bombay as a picture in a cinema show, all unreal and shadowy.”

He had to address a meeting of the National Union, at Mahajan Wadi on 19th January at Girgaum. But how was he to speak in this condition? He spoke to Lele who asked him to pray, but in that solid silence he could not pray. Then Lele said that it did not matter, he and others would pray; all that Sri Aurobindo had to do was to make *namaskar* (obeisance) to the audience as Narayana and then some voice would speak. And so it happened; something spoke. The lecture on *Nationalism* in his new perspective made a great impression and it was spoken of for a long time afterwards.

Before leaving Bombay for Calcutta, Sri Aurobindo asked Lele for instructions. "He was giving me detailed instructions. In the meantime I told him of a Mantra that had arisen in my heart. Suddenly while giving instructions he stopped and asked me if I could rely absolutely on Him who gave me the Mantra. I replied that I could always do that. Then Lele said that there was no need of further instructions."¹⁵

As Sri Aurobindo explained later: "The final upshot was that he was made by a Voice within him to hand me over to the Divine within me enjoining absolute surrender to its will—a principle or rather a seed force to which I kept unswervingly and increasingly till it led me through all the mazes of an incalculable Yogic development bound by no single rule or style or dogma or Shastra to where and what I am now and towards what shall be hereafter."¹⁶

He detrained at several place on his way back to Calcutta and spoke at meetings in Nasik, Dhulia, Amravati, Nagpur. Everywhere he was heard with rapt attention. There was a new spiritual quality in his words and his theme was the same everywhere: Nationalism as a religion, as an imperative from God. He returned to Calcutta early in February, 1908.

Manicktolla

THERE WAS IN the heart of Calcutta city a property (with large grounds and a house) belonging to the family of Sri Aurobindo. Barin had converted it into a rendezvous for his group to prepare and carry on their revolutionary activities. He had also some knowledge of the technique of making bombs—originally picked up from a chemist in Baroda—and they were experimenting with preparing them. Of course they had other programmes too viz. meditations, study of the Gita and revolutionary thought and so on. Sri Aurobindo was aware of this activity of Barin and his friends at the Manicktolla gardens but was not involved in them.

Now in February 1908 Barin invited Lele to Calcutta, his idea being that it would be good to have his youths initiated into spiritual life. But when Lele arrived and saw what was being done, he was very displeased and advised them to stop those dangerous activities. It was not necessary, he told them, to resort to violence; freedom for the country would come without recourse to arms. But nobody took him seriously, nobody listened to him though he predicted utter ruin to them if they didn't.

When he met Sri Aurobindo, things took an unexpected turn. Lele enquired about his yoga. While leaving Bombay, Sri Aurobindo had been asked by him to meditate at a fixed time and hear the voice in the heart. Sri Aurobindo writes: "I didn't hear any voice from the heart but a quite different one from above, and stopped meditation at a fixed hour because meditation was going on all the time. When Lele came to Calcutta and heard about all this, he said to me, "The Devil has caught hold of you'. I replied, 'If it is the Devil, I will then follow him.'"¹⁷

When Lele said thereupon that he would not be responsible for the consequences of the course Sri Aurobindo was pursuing, he freed Lele from all responsibility. Lele left in a huff. His forebodings about the

revolutionary practices and the fate of the young men involved came true.

Thus ended one chapter in the spiritual career of Sri Aurobindo. He ever retained his gratefulness to Lele for the help he had received and acknowledged it on several occasions. He recalls: "I got three things from Lele: the silent Barhman consciousness with its infinite wideness—an experience which was concrete; the power to speak and write without using the mind; and the habit of putting myself under the guidance of a Power higher than the mind."¹⁸

Sri Aurobindo's induction of eligible young men into the revolutionary movement continued. He took care to hold before his countrymen the proper perspective of the freedom of India in the context of Asia and the world. He wrote in the *Bande Mataram* on April 1, 1908: "*The position of India makes her the key of Asia*" She divides the Pagan Far East from the Mohammedan West, and is their meeting-place. From her alone can proceed a force of union, a starting-point of comprehension, a reconciliation of Mohammedanism and Paganism. Her freedom is necessary to the unity of Asia. Geographically, she occupies an impregnable position of strength commanding the East of Asia as well as the West, from which as from a secure fortress she can strike the nations of the Persian or the Chinese world. Such a position held by an European Power means a perpetual menace to the safety of Asia. It will, therefore, be the first enterprise of a Sino-Japanese alliance to eject the English from India, and hold her in the interests of Asiatic freedom and Asiatic Unity—the awakening of Bengal has come just in time to give India a chance of recovering her freedom of action. If she strains every nerve to use the chance, if she is able to develop her self-consciousness, her unity, her warlike instincts, her industrial independence, she will be in a position to assert her own will to offer herself as an ally and not an instrument, it may be even...to mediate between the civilisation of Europe and Asia both of them so necessary to human development."¹⁹

The young band around Barin went on with their experiments and rehearsals. There were accidents and even a death (at Deoghar) while practising throwing bombs. The general atmosphere in Bengal was tense, what with the authorities trying to put down every mode of agitation with stern repressive measures, like flogging in the open court till the

victim fell unconscious and so on. Kingsford was one of such magistrates known for their extreme cruelty, and no wonder, one day—30th April, 1908—two young men from the Manicktolla group (Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki) threw a bomb at his carriage in Muzaffarpur. Unfortunately the occupant of the carriage at that time was not Kingsford but two ladies, Mrs. and Miss Kennedy, both of whom were killed. This led to several arrests and raids.

Sri Aurobindo, who was watching the developments, warned Barin to clear the Manicktolla gardens of all dangerous give--away items like crude bombs, explosives, arms etc. and all of them to leave the place. But before he could carry out this evacuation operation fully, the police swooped down at midnight on May 2, 1908, arrested the occupants and took possession of all the tell-tale articles lying on the floor and under.

Next the police entered the residence of Sri Aurobindo—48 Grey St., early in the morning of May 2, 1908.

To Alipore Jail

THE SEQUENCE OF events that followed is best narrated by the principal character around whom they centred. Sri Aurobindo describes them graphically in *Kara Kahani* his reminiscent *Tales of Prison Life*:

“I was sleeping without a worry. At about five in the morning my sister rushed to my room in an agitated manner and called me out by name. I got up. The next moment the small room was filled with armed policemen; Superintendent Cregan, Mr. Clark of 24 Parganas, the charming and delightful visage of familiar Sriman Benod Kumar Gupta, a few inspectors, red turbans, spies and search witnesses. They all came running like heroes, pistols in hand, as though they were besieging, with guns and cannon, a well-armed fort. I heard that a white hero had aimed a pistol at my sister’s breast, but I did not see it. I was sitting on my bed, still half-asleep, when Cregan inquired, ‘Who is Aurobindo Ghose, is that you?’ I answered ‘Yes, I am Aurobindo Ghose.’ Immediately he ordered a policeman to put me under arrest. Then, because of an extremely objectionable expression used by Cregan, there was a little exchange of words between the two, I asked for the search warrant, read and signed it. Finding a mention of bombs in the warrant I understood that the presence of these soldiers and policemen was concerned with the Muzaffarpur killing. The one thing I did not understand was why, even before any bombs or explosives had been discovered in my house, I was arrested in the absence of a body warrant. But I did not raise any useless objections. Afterwards, under instructions from Cregan, my arms were handcuffed, and a rope tied round my middle. An upcountry constable stood behind me holding the rope end.

“Nearly half an hour after, I do not know at whose bidding, they removed the rope and the handcuff. From Cregan’s words it appeared as if he had entered the lair of some ferocious animal, as if we were a lot of uneducated, wild, lawbreakers, and it was unnecessary to speak

or behave courteously towards us. But after the sharp exchange the sahib grew a little milder. Benodbabu tried to explain something about me to him. After which Cregan asked me: 'It seems you are B.A. Is it not a shame for an educated person like you to be sleeping on the floor of an unfurnished room and in a house like this? 'I am a poor man, and I live like one,' I said. 'Then you have worked up all this mischief with the idea of becoming a rich man?' Cregan replied in a loud voice. Knowing how impossible it was to explain the love of the motherland, sacrifice or the sublimity of a vow of poverty to this thick-skulled Briton I did not make the attempt.

"All the while the search continued. Beginning at five-thirty, it was over at about eleven-thirty. Inside or outside the boxes, all the exercise books, letters, papers, scraps, poems, plays, prose, essays, translations, nothing escaped the clutches of the all engrossing search.

"Nothing remarkable transpired in the course of the search. But I recollect Mr. Clark looking long and suspiciously at the sacred earth from Dakshineswar that had been kept in a small cardboard box; he suspected it might be some new and terribly powerful explosive. In a sense Mr. Clark's suspicions were not unfounded. In the end decision was reached that it was a piece of earth which was unnecessary to send to a chemical analyst. I did not join the search except to open a few boxes. No papers or letters were shown or read out to me.

"Nor was I at all curious, since I knew it was impossible that there might be in my house any formula for the manufacture of explosives or documents relating to conspiracy."

The party was then taken to the police station and from there towards Lal Bazar. At the Lal Bazar lock-up there was an altercation with Halliday, the Police Commissioner.

Halliday: Aren't you ashamed of being involved in this cowardly, dastardly activity?

Sri Aurobindo: What right have you to assume that I was involved?

H: I am not assumign. I know everything.

Sri A: What you know or do not know is your concern. I wholly deny having any connection with these murderous acts.

From there to the magistrate's court and then to Alipore.

"My prison life at Alipore began on May 5. Next year, on May 6, I was released."

Sri Aurobindo observes, philosophically: "Friday, May 1, 1908...I did not know that, that day would mean the end of a chapter in my life and that there stretched before me, a year's imprisonment during which period all my human relations would cease, that for a whole year I would have to live, beyond the pale of society, live like an animal in a cage. And when I would re-enter the world of activity, it would not be the old familiar Aurobindo Ghose...I have spoken of a year's imprisonment. It would have been more appropriate to speak of a year's living in an ashrama or a hermitage...The only result of the wrath of the British Government was that I found God."

Alipore Bomb Trial

AS MANY AS forty-two persons were charged and prosecuted; one group was of Sri Aurobindo and the other of nine persons. The case was brought up before Mr. Birley, District Magistrate of Alipore, on May 17, 1908. Application for bail for Sri Aurobindo was not granted. All were charged with “organising gang for the purpose of waging war against the Government by means of criminal force.” The preliminary trial lasted seventy-six days.

The prisoners alternated between solitary confinement and group detention. The assassination of the approver, Narendranath Gossain on August 31, 1908 queered the pitch and whatever little mercies had been allowed were withdrawn.

On 19th October the case was committed to sessions before C.B. Beachcroft I.C.S., Additional Magistrate, Alipore, in the premises of the jail. Beachcroft had been a schoolmate and also a colleague of Sri Aurobindo in Cambridge; in fact in the I.C.S. examination he had stood second in Greek while Sri Aurobindo had stood first.

Four thousand documents, 300 to 400 exhibits including explosives, bombs, revolvers were produced as evidence. 206 witnesses were examined. The case went on till April 13, 1909 for 131 days—and the judgement was delivered on May 6, 1909. The case was a sensation; with the prosecution engaging the services of the most eminent criminal lawyer, Eardly Norton and the redoubtable Chittaranjan Das defending Sri Aurobindo, the principal accused. Sarojini, the sister of Sri Aurobindo, had issued a public appeal for help to organise the defence. It read:

“My countrymen are aware that my brother Arabinda Ghose stands accused of a grave offence. But I believe, and I have reason to think that the vast majority of my countrymen believe, that he is quite innocent. I think if he is defended by an able counsel he is sure to be acquitted.

But as he has taken a vow of poverty in the service of the Motherland, he has no means to engage the services of an eminent barrister-at-law. I am, therefore, under the painful necessity of appealing to the public spirit and generosity of my countrymen on his behalf. I know all my countrymen do not hold the same political opinions as he. But I feel some delicacy in saying that probably there are few Indians who do not appreciate his great attainment, his self-sacrifice, his single-minded devotion to the country's cause and the high spirituality of his character. These embolden me, a woman, to stand before every son and daughter of India for help to defend a brother—my brother and theirs too.”

There was a touching response, from the rich as well as the poor, from within the country and from abroad.

It is a matter of history how C.R. Das raised the whole issue to a high level of principle and nation-rights and altered the complexion of the case. His eight-day speech for the defence concluded with the famous peroration:

“My appeal to you is this, that long after the controversy will be hushed in silence, long after this turmoil, the agitation will have ceased, long after he is dead and gone, he will be looked upon as the poet of patriotism, as the prophet of nationalism and the lover of humanity. Long after he is dead and gone, his words will be echoed and re-echoed, not only in India but across the distant seas and lands. Therefore, I say that the man in his position is not only standing before the bar of this court, but before the bar of the High Court of History.”

That was in 1909. Today, we are witnessing a growing fulfilment of this prophecy to the very letter.

The jury gave a verdict of “Not guilty” on April 14, 1909. The judge Mr. Beachcroft, accepted their verdict and delivered his judgment on May 6, 1909 acquitting Sri Aurobindo and many others—about fifteen of them. Some were sentenced to varying terms of imprisonment. Barin and another, Ulhaskar, were sentenced to death but this was commuted to transportation for life by the High Court.

Ashramvas in Alipore

FOR SRI AUROBINDO Alipore had meant a total revolution, not an outer, political one, but an unexpected spiritual transformation. He came out a completely changed person. What was the content of that inner revolution, how did it come about? Sri Aurobindo describes it in his Uttarpara speech, delivered impromptu:

“When I was arrested and hurried to the Lal Bazar Hajat I was shaken in faith for a while, for I could not look into the heart of His intention. Therefore I faltered for a moment and cried out in my heart to Him. ‘What is this that has happened to me? I believed that I had a mission to work for the people of my country and until that work was done, I should have Thy protection. Why then am I here and on such a charge?’ A day passed and a second day and a third, when a voice came to me from within, ‘Wait and see!’ Then I grew calm and waited. I was taken from Lal Bazar to Alipore and was placed for one month in a solitary cell apart from men. There I waited day and night for the voice of God within me, to know what He had to say to me, to learn what I had to do. In this seclusion the earliest realisation, the first lesson came to me. I remembered then that a month or more before my arrest, a call had come to me to put aside all activity, to go into seclusion and to look into myself, so that I might enter into closer communion with Him. I was weak and could not accept the call. My work was very dear to me and in the pride of my heart I thought that unless I was there, it would suffer or even fail and cease; therefore I would not leave it. It seemed to me that He spoke to me again and said, ‘The bonds you had not the strength to break, I have broken for you, because it is not my will nor was it ever my intention that should continue. I have had another thing for you to do and it is for that I have brought you here, to teach you what you could not learn for yourself and to train you for my work.’

Then He placed the Gita in my hands. His strength entered into me and I was able to do the sadhana of the Gita. I was not only to understand intellectually but to realise what Sri Krishna demanded of Arjuna and what He demands of those who aspire to do His work, to be free from repulsion and desire, to do work for Him without the demand for fruit, to renounce self-will and become a passive and faithful instrument in His hands, to have an equal heart for high and low, friend and opponent, success and failure, yet not to do His work negligently. I realised what the Hindu religion meant. We speak often of the Hindu religion, of the Sanatan Dharma, but few of us really know what that religion is. Other religions are preponderatingly religions of faith and profession, but the Sanatan Dharma is life itself; it is a thing that has not so much to be believed as lived. This is the Dharma that for the salvation of humanity was cherished in the seclusion of this peninsula form of old. It is to give this religion that India is rising. She does not rise as other countries do, for self or when she is strong, to trample on the weak. She is rising to shed the eternal light entrusted to her over the world. India has always existed for humanity and not for herself and it is for humanity and not for herself that she must be great.

Therefore this was the next thing: He pointed out to me. He made me realise the central truth of the Hindu religion. He truned the hearts of my jailors to me and they spoke to the Englishman in charge of the jail, 'He is suffering in his confinement; let him at least walk outside his cell for half an hour in the morning and in the evening.' So it was arranged, and it was while I was walking that His strength again entered into me. I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell but it was not the tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me His shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given to me for a couch and felt the arms of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover. This was the first use of the deeper vision He gave me. I looked at the prisoners in the jail; the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers, and as I looked at them I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in these darkened souls and misused bodies. Amongst

these thieves and dacoits there were many who put me to shame by their sympathy, their kindness, the humanity triumphant over such adverse circumstances. One I saw among them especially, who seemed to me a saint, a peasant of my nation who did not know how to read and write, an alleged dacoit sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, one of those whom we look down upon in our Pharisaical pride of class as *chhotalok*. Once more He spoke to me and said, 'Behold the people among whom I have sent you to do a little of my work. This is the nature of the nation I am raising up and the reason why I raise them'.

When the case opened in the lower court and we were brought before the Magistrate I was followed by the same insight. He said to me, 'When you were cast into jail, did not your heart fail and did you not cry out to me, where is Thy portection? Look now at the Magistrate look now at the Prosecuting Counsel.' I looked and it was not the Magistrate whom I saw, it was Vasudeva, it was Narayana who was sitting there on the bench. I looked at the prosecuting Counsel and it was not the Counsel for the prosecution that I saw; it was Sri Krishna who sat there, it was my Lover and Friend who sat there and smiled. 'Now do you fear?' He said, 'I am in all men and I overrule their actions and their words. My protection is still with you and you shall not fear. This case which is brought against you, leave it in my hand. It is not for you. It was not for the trial that I brought you here but for something else. The case itself is only a means for my works and nothing more.'

Afterwards when the trial opened in the Sessions Court, I began to write many instructions for my counsel as to what was false in the evidence against me and on what points the witnesses might be cross-examined. Then something happened which I had not expected. The arrangements which had been made for my defence were suddenly changed and another Counsel stood there to defend me. He came unexpectedly, a friend of mine, but I did not know he was coming. You have all heard the name of the man who put away from him all other thoughts and abandoned all his practice, who sat up half the night day after day for months and broke his health to save me,—Srijut Chittaranjan Das. When I saw him, I was satisfied, but I still thought it necessary to write instructions. Then all that was put away from me and I had the message from within, "This is the man who will save you from the snares put around your feet. Put aside these papers. It is not you who

will instruct him. I will instruct him.' From that time I did not myself speak a word to my counsel about the case or give a single instruction, and if ever I was asked a question, I always found that my answer did not help the case. I had left it to him and he took it entirely into his hands, with what results you know. I knew all along what He meant for me, for I heard it again and again, always I listened to the voice within; 'I am giuiding, therefore fear not. Turn to your own work for which I have brought you to jail and when you come out, remember never to fear, never to hesitate. Remember that it is I who am doing this, not you nor any other. Therefore whatever clouds may come, whatever dangers and sufferings, whatever difficulties, whatever impossibilities, there is nothing impossible, nothing difficult. I am in the nation and its uprising and I am Vasudeva, I am Narayana, and what I will, shall be, not what others will, What I chose to bring about, no human power can stay.'

Meanwhile He had brought me out of solitude and placed me among those who had been accused along with me.

I found myself among these young men and in many of them I discovered a mighty courage, a power of self-effacement in comparison with which I was simply nothing. I saw one or two who were not only superior to me in force and character,—very many were that,—but in the promise of that intellectual ability on which I prided myself. He said to me. 'This is the young generation, the new and mighty nation that is arising at my command. They were greater than yourself What have you to fear? If you stood aside or slept, the work would still be done. If you were cast aside tomorrow, here are the young men who will take up your work and do it more mightly than you have ever done. You have only got some strength from me to speak a word to this nation which will help me to raise it'. This was the next thing He told me.

Then a thing happened suddenly and in a moment I was hurried away to the seclusion of a solitary cell. What happened to me during that period I am not impelled to say, but only this, that day after day, He showed me His wonders and made me realise the utter truth of the Hindu religion. I had had many doubts before. I was brought up in England amongst foreign ideas and an atmosphere entirely foreign. About many things in Hinduism I had once been inclined to believe that they were imaginations, that there was much of dream in it. much that was delusion and Maya. But now day after day I realised in the

mind, I realised in the heart, I realised in the body the truths of the Hindu religion. They became living experiences to me, and things were opened to me which no material science could explain. When I first approached Him, it was not entirely in the spirit of the Bhakta, it was not entirely in the spirit of the Jnani. I came to him long ago in Baroda some years before the Swadeshi began and I was drawn into the public field.

When I approached God at that time, I hardly had a living faith in Him. The agnostic was in me, the atheist was in me, the sceptic was in me and I was not absolutely sure that there was a God at all. I did not feel His presence. Yet something drew me to the truth of the Vedas, the truth of the Gita, the truth of the Hindu religion. I felt there must be a mighty truth somewhere in this Yoga, a mighty truth in this religion based on the Vedanta. So when I turned to the Yoga and resolved to practise it and find out if my idea was right, I did it in this spirit and with this prayer to Him, 'If Thou art, then Thou knowest my heart. Thou knowest that I do not ask for Mukti, I do not ask for anything which others ask for. I ask only for strength to uplift this nation, I ask only to be allowed to live and work for this people whom I love and to whom I pray that I may devote my life.' I strove long for the realisation of Yoga and at last to some extent I had it, but in what I most desired I was not satisfied. Then in the seclusion of the jail, of the solitary cell I asked for it again. I said, 'Give me Thy Adesh. I do not know what work to do or how to do it. Give me a message.' In the communion of Yoga two messages came. The first message said, 'I have given you a work and it is to help to uplift this nation. Before long the time will come when you will have to go out of jail; for it is not my will that this time either you should be convicted or that you should pass the time, as others have to do, in suffering for their country. I have called you to work, and that is the Adesh for which you have asked. I give you the Adesh to go forth and do my work.' The second message came and it said, 'Something has been shown to you in this year of seclusion, something about which you had your doubts and it is the truth of the Hindu religion. It is this religion that I am raising up before the world. It is this that I have perfected and developed through the Rishis, saints and Avatars, and now it is going forth to do my work among the nations. I am raising up this nation to send forth my word. This is the Sanatan Dharma, this is

the eternal religion which you did not really know before, but which I have now revealed to you. The agnostic and the sceptic in you have been answered, for I have given you proofs within and without you, physical and subjective, which have satisfied you. When you go forth, speak to your nation always this word, that it is for the Sanatan Dharma that they arise, it is for the world and for not for themselves that they arise. I am giving them freedom for the service of the world. When therefore it is said that India shall rise, it is the Sanatan Dharma that shall rise. When it is said that India shall be great, it is the Sanatan Dharma that shall be great. When it is said that India shall expand and extend herself, it is the Sanatan Dharma that shall expand and extend itself over the world. It is for Dharma and by the Dharma that India exists. To magnify the religion means to magnify the country. I have shown you that I am everywhere and in all men and in all-things, that I am in this movement and I am not only working in those who are striving for the country but I am working also in those who oppose them and stand in their path. I am working in everybody and whatever men may think or do they can do nothing but help on my purpose. They also are doing my work, they are not my enemies but my instruments. In all your actions you are moving forward without knowing which way you move. You mean to do one thing and you do another. You aim at a result and your efforts subserve one that is different or contrary. It is Shakti that has gone forth and entered into the people. Since long ago I have been preparing this uprising and now the time has come and it is I who will lead it to its fulfilment.”²⁰

Sri Aurobindo studied the Gita and the Upanishads: he meditated with the help of the Upanishads and practised the yoga of the Gita. He had several occult and spiritual experiences of which some may be mentioned.

Once as he was wondering, during his sadhna, whether siddhis (powers) like levitation were possible at all, he found himself raised up, with only one part of the body in some contact with the ground. On another occasion when he was practising raising of his arms and leaving them in that suspended position without muscular effort, he went to

sleep; the warden who saw the scene from outside, was alarmed and reported that he was dead!

He experimented upon his body by fasting for eleven days to see what spiritual benefit accrued from it. Though he lost about ten pounds in weight, he had no adverse effects; he could lift a pail of water above his head, which he could not normally do. He was to go on a more extended fast later.

Some of his fellow detainees had marked that his hair was glistening and wondered how he got hair-oil for use. Upendra Banerjee, a co-undertrial, describes: "One day I found his hair shining with oil. This was extraordinary and confounding, as we were not allowed oil. So I made bold to ask him, 'Do you have oil for your hair?' He stunned me with the reply, 'I do not bathe.' 'But your hair looks shiny.' 'It does. But you see I am passing through some physical changes as I develop spiritually. My hair draws fat from the body',"²¹

A more important development was the sudden opening of the capacity for appreciating painting. He notes: "I knew something about sculpture, but (was) blind to painting. Suddenly one day in the Alipore Jail while meditating I saw some pictures on the walls of the cell and lo and behold: the artistic eye in me opened and I knew all about painting except of course the more material side of the technique."²²

A still more important event was the visit of Swami Vivekananda's spirit for a particular purpose. When asked about it, he replied: "It was the spirit of Vivekananda who first gave me a clue in the direction of the Supermind. This clue led me to see how the Truth-Consciousness works in everything. He didn't say 'Supermind'. 'Supermind' is my own word. He just said to me. 'This is this, this is that' and so on. That was how he proceeded—by pointing and indicating. He visited me for fifteen days in Alipore Jail and, until I could grasp the whole thing, he went on teaching me and impressed upon my mind the working of the Higher Consciousness—the Truth-Consciousness in general—which leads towards the Supermind. He would not leave until he had put it all into my head."²³

Sri Aurobindo makes it clear that it was not a vision but a concrete experience during meditation and it continued for nearly a fortnight.

Speaking to Anilbaran Roy in 1926, he describes how Vivekananda explained the detailed working of the intuitivised mind, mind as organised by the Supramental.

It may be asked why Vivekananda did not speak of the Consciousness when alive. Could it be that he came to know of them after leaving his body? It is possible he may have come to know afterwards; it is equally possible that he might have known but had not spoken of it. "A Yogi does not say all he knows." (Sri Aurobindo).

Karmayogin

“THE SAME WISTFUL, distant look in his eyes, outwardly unconcerned and unperturbed. He had, as it were, drawn his mind into the depths of his being”²⁴ This is how he is described by his host S. R. Das (a cousin of C. R. Das) to whose house Sri Aurobindo and those acquitted with him went straight from the prison, after their release on May 6, 1909.

On 14th May Sri Aurobindo wrote a letter to the Editor of the Bengalee:

Sir,

Will you kindly allow me to express through your columns my deep sense of gratitude to all who have helped me in my hour of trial? Of the innumerable friends known and unknown who have contributed each his mite to swell my defence fund, it is impossible for me now even to learn the names, and I must ask them to accept this public expression of my feeling in place of private gratitude; since my acquittal many telegrams and letters have reached me and they are too numerous to reply to individually. The love which my countrymen have heaped upon me in return for the little I have been able to do for them, amply repays any apparent trouble or misfortune my public activity may have brought upon me. I attribute my escape to no human agency, but first of all to the protection of the Mother of us all who has never been absent from me but always held me in Her arms and shielded me from grief and disaster, and secondarily to the prayers of thousands which have been going up to Her on my behalf ever since I was arrested. If it is the love of my countrymen which led me into danger, it is also the love of my countrymen which has brought me safe through it.

Aurobindo Ghose

Sri Aurobindo stayed with his maternal uncle, Krishna Kumar Mitra's family after he came out of jail. Despite the great spiritual changes that had taken place in him, he continued to be intensely human and considerate. It appears his aunt who had been unwell had been advised to bathe in the Ganges. She wanted somebody to accompany her to the river. At times, the old lady would go up to Sri Aurobindo who might be writing and ask him, 'Auro, please come along with me, I am going for my bath in the Ganges' and he would readily comply. Basanti Chakravarty, his cousin, describes how at times her mother would put on his sandals and go for her constitutional on the terrace. Visitors would arrive and Sri Aurobindo would get up and search for his sandals. Then he would espy his aunt, smile and ask her shyly, 'Little aunty, have you put on my sandals? There are visitors who have come to see me'²⁵

It was on May 30, 1909 that he delivered the inspired speech at Uttarpara that made history. It was an extraordinarily festive occasion and ten thousand people heard the Voice that spoke through him. A few among the young men of the Yugantar party would come to Sri Aurobindo at his residence to study the Gita. He sat with them on the verandah and expounded the scripture completely unmindful of the passage of time. It appears that one day it was one o'clock and his class was still in progress. His sister came on the scene with his lunch plate and the proceedings were terminated.

There had been a complete change in the political scene. Most of the leaders of the Nationalist party were in prison; many had withdrawn from public activity. As a result of the unrelenting suppression by the Government, the morale of the people had sunk low though resentment against the British continued unabated. Sri Aurobindo describes the situation and his reaction: "The storm that swept over the country has scattered them (colleagues) far and wide. One who always sat by my side and was associated in my work is a prisoner in Burma; another is in the north rotting in detention. I looked round when I came out, I looked round for those to whom I had been accustomed to look for counsel and inspiration. I did not find them. There was more than that. When I went to jail the whole country was alive with the cry of *Bande Mataram*, alive with the hope of a nation, the hope of millions of men who had newly risen out of degradation. When I came out of jail I

listened for that cry, but there was instead a silence. A hush had fallen on the country and men seemed bewildered: for instead of God's bright heaven full of the vision of the future that had been before us, there seemed to be overhead a leaden sky from which human thunders and lightnings rained. No man seemed to know which way to move, and from all sides came the question, 'What shall we do next? What is there that we can do?' I too did not know which way to move, I too did not know what was next to be done. But one thing I knew, that as it was the Almighty Power of God which had raised that cry, that hope, so it was the same Power which had sent down that silence. He who was in the shouting and the movements was also in the pause and the hush. He has sent it upon us, so that the nation might draw back for a moment and look into itself and know His Will. I have not been disheartened by that silence, because I had been made familiar with silence in my prison and because I knew it was in the pause and the hush that I had myself learned this lesson through the long year of detention...

"I knew I would come out. The year of detention was meant only for a year of seclusion and of training. How could any one hold me in jail longer than was necessary for God's purpose? He had given me a word to speak and a work to do, and until that word was spoken, I knew no human power could hush me, until that work was done no human power could stop God's instrument, however weak that instrument might be or however small."²⁶

So without being disheartened Sri Aurobindo girded up his loins and resumed his public activity. He wrote, he spoke, he conferred. He exhorted his countrymen not to be disheartened but to take courage and rise to the occasion. In his speech at Jhalakati (23 June, 1909) he declared: 'It is a strange idea, a foolish idea...to think that a nation which has once risen, once has been called up by the voice of God to rise, will be stopped by mere physical repression. It has never so happened in the history of a nation, nor will it so happen in the history of India...Repression is nothing but the hammer of God that is beating us into shape so that we may be moulded into a mighty nation and an instrument for his work in the world. We are iron upon his anvil and the blows are showering upon us not to destroy but to recreate. Without suffering there can be no growth.'²⁷

He started a Weekly, *Karmayogin*, on June 19, 1909, Suggestions had been made to revive the *Bande Mataram* or to take over the editorship

of the *Bengalee*, but he declined. He sought a fresh avenue for his expression and instrumentation. The *Karmayogin* was launched as “a weekly review of National religion, Literature, Science, Philosophy, etc.” The objectives were clear. “We have yet to know ourselves, what we were and may be; what we did in the past and what we are capable of doing in the future: our history and our mission. This is the first and most important work which the *Karmayogin* sets for itself to popularise this knowledge. And the second thing is how to use these assets so as to swell the sum of national life and produce the future. It is easy to appraise their relations to the past; it is more difficult to give them their place in the future. The third thing is to know the outside world and its relation to us and how to deal with it. This is the problem which we find at present the most difficult and insistent, but its solution depends on the solution of the others.”

Further: “We shall notice current events only as they evidence, help, effect or resist the growth of national life and the development of the soul of the nation. Political and social problems we shall deal with from this standpoint, seeking first their spiritual roots and inner causes and then proceeding to measures and remedies. In a similar spirit we shall deal with all sources of national strength in the past and in the present, seeking to bring them home to all comprehensions and make them applicable to our life, dynamic and not static, creative and not merely preservative. For if there is no creation, there must be disintegration; if there is no advance and victory, there must be recoil and defeat.”²⁸

The Weekly continued till April 2, 1910, under his editorship till he left for Chandernagore in February 1910 and thereafter the next eight issues under Sister Nivedita’s direction. Among his writings that appeared in its columns—apart from his political ones—were: English translations of the Isha, Kena and Katha Upanishads; renderings of Kalidasa’s *Ritusamhara*, Thirteen chapters of Bankim Chandra’s *Anandamath*; poems including *Baji Prabhu*; *A System of National Education*, *The Barin of India*, *The National Value of Art*, *The ideal of the Karmayogin*; *Conversations of the Dead*.

Karmayogin was in English. On August 23, 1909 Sri Aurobindo started a Bengali Weekly called *Dharma*. Its object was declared to be the propagation of the *sanatan dharma*, the Eternal Religion: “Our

aim is to spread the eternal religion and, based on that eternal religion, the observance of the religion of the race and the spirit of the age. It should be our first aim to give the entire nation, especially the youth of the country, an adequate education, high ideals and a way of activity that will arouse these Aryan ideals (knowledge, devotion, non-attached activity, liberality, love, courage, energy, modesty).''²⁹

Sri Aurobindo wrote for this journal in Bengali. He wrote on the Upanishads, Puranas, the Gita, religion, spirituality, nationalism. *Dharma* continued to appear till after he left for Chandernagore. The last issue was of March 28, 1910. Both the *Papers did well financially and had no problem as the Bande Mataram* had. His well known Durga-Stotra appeared in the *Dharma* issue of October 18, 1909.

The air was thick with rumours of pending arrests and deportations. Sister Nivedita who had her own access to sources in the European community warned Sri Aurobindo of the Government moves to detain or deport him and advised him to move to any place beyond the reach of the British arm. But Sri Aurobindo declined and wrote instead "An Open Letter to my Countrymen"—his 'last political will and testament'—in the *Karmayogin* of July 31, 1909, giving directions to his fellow Nationalists in the event of his detention or deportation. He wrote: "Our ideal of Swaraj involves no hatred of any other nation nor of the administration which is now established by law in this country. We find a bureaucratic administration, we wish to make it democratic; we find an alien government, we wish to make it indigenious; we find a foreign control, we wish to render it Indian. We demand the realisation of our corporate existence as a distinct race and nation because that is the only way in which the ultimate brotherhood of humanity can be achieved, not by blotting out individual peoples and effacing outward distinctions, but by removing the internal obstacles to unity, the cause of hatred, malice and misunderstanding. A struggle for our rights does not involve hatred of those who mistakenly deny them."

And he summed up the Policy for the Nationalists:

“1. Persistence with a strict regard to law in a peaceful policy of self-help and passive resistance;

2. The regulation of our attitude towards the Government by the principle of 'No Control, No Co-operation;

3. A rapprochement with the Moderate party wherever possible and the reconstitution of a united Congress;

4. The regulation of the Boycott Movement so as to make both the political and the economic boycott effective;

5. The reorganisation of the Province, if not of the whole country, according to our original programme;

6. A system of co-operation which will not contravene the law but will yet enable workers to proceed with the work of self-help and national efficiency, if not quite so effectively as before, yet with energy and success."³⁰

The open letter had the desired effect, as confirmed later by Sister Nivedita who reported that the proposal to deport him had been dropped by the Government, at any rate for the time being.

The Bengal Provincial Conference in September 1909 was held at Hoogly. Sri Aurobindo took vigorous part in its deliberations and marshalled the Nationalist opposition to the stand of the Moderates who had drafted resolutions welcoming the Minto-Morley Reforms just announced by the British Government. He succeeded in getting his own resolutions accepted but desisted from driving home his advantage when there appeared the danger of the Moderates leaving the Congress. He modified those resolutions and got the Moderates to propose them. He instructed his followers not to oppose these so that the political unity of Bengal might be preserved. As they were none too enthusiastic about this step, he had them absent themselves from the session. The Moderates were sore that people were heeding young leaders like Sri Aurobindo instead of following the old leadership.

Surendranath Banerjee called a meeting of the moderates and of Sri Aurobindo and other Nationalist leaders of Bengal to arrive at a united front in the ensuing Congress Session at Banaras. This involved a queer arrangement: the Moderates voting for the Nationalists as delegates and the Nationalists accepting the Constitution framed by the Moderates earlier at Surat. Sri Aurobindo would not compromise on certain fundamental issues. He insisted upon each political body having the freedom to send its chosen delegates to the Congress and also to have the right to effect a change in the Constitution. No wonder, with such wide differences in approach, the talks broke down.

Sri Aurobindo looked into the possibility of working independently. A movement like the Home Rule, later projected by Annie Besant, looked like a possibility but that involved giving up of the ideal of Independence. He considered passive resistance but perceived that he would not be its leader. He defined the Nationalist position *vis-a-vis* the Reforms: No Co-operation without Control.

The Bengal Government, however, was on the look-out for every opening to neutralise Sri Aurobindo, and his signed article in the *Karmayogin* issue of December 25, 1909, 'To My Countrymen' was seized upon to bring a charge of sedition. It was a review of the political situation and was quite moderate in tone. And as it happened, the High Court later refused to regard it as seditious and acquitted the printer. About these two Open Letters in the *Karmayogin*, Sri Aurobindo observes: "Sri Aurobindo was not relying upon any change in Government policy for the effect of the first letter. He writes clearly that the proposed reforms were false and unreal and not acceptable. All he says is that if real reforms giving real power or control were offered, even if they have only partial and not complete self-government then the Nationalist Party might accept them as the means towards complete self-government. Till then the Nationalists would maintain the struggle and their policy of non-cooperation and passive resistance. He relied not upon this but upon an intuitive perception that the Government would not think it politic or useful to deport him if he left a programme which others could carry out in his absence. Also the considerations about Home Rule and complete passive resistance had no connection with the first letter, because they did not occur to Sri Aurobindo at that time. It was afterwards about the period of the second signed letter that he weighed the circumstances and the situation in the country and considered whether it would not be necessary for a time to draw back a little in order to make a continued political action possible, *reculer pour mieux sauter*, as the national movement seemed otherwise threatened with a complete pause. A Home Rule movement or a movement of the South African type suggested themselves to him and he foresaw that they might be resorted to in the near future; but he decided that such movements were not for him to lead and that he must go on with the movement for independence as it was. In the second letter also he rejects the reforms as inadequate and advocates a continuance and reorganisation of the Nationalist movement. This was on 25th December, five months after the first letter."³¹

Chandernagore

SRI AUROBINDO USED to visit the office of the *Karmayogin* and *Dharma* at 4 Shyam Pukur Lane at four in the evening. A few of his young associates gathered round him and, when work was slack, there would be experiments in automatic writing. On the evening of January 24, 1910 news came of the shooting down of Shams-ul-Alam, the Dy. Superintendent of the C.I.D. on the steps of the High Court by a young man of twenty, Birendranath Dattagupta. This tensed the atmosphere once again the air was thick and rumours of all kinds spread. The Government decided to nab Sri Aurobindo, and looking for some plausible excuse, thought they had found it in his signed article, 'To My Countrymen' in the issue of the *Karmayogin* of December 25, 1909.

One night soon after—some time about the middle of February—Ramchandra Majumdar, on the staff of the *Karmayogin*, hurried to inform that he had just heard from his father, a police official, that a search of Sri Aurobindo's office premises and his arrest were imminent. There was an agitated discussion among the young men present, some proposing to resist the police. Sri Aurobindo was sitting calm, listening to the excited discussion; suddenly he heard a clear voice from above:

“No go to Chandernagore.” Chandernagore was at that time a French settlement near Calcutta.

“Come, let us go out just now,” said Sri Aurobindo to those around. He sent word to Sister Nivedita requesting her to take charge of the *Karmayogin* in his absence. Then he set out with three young men. Strangely there were no C.I.D. men outside the office that evening. Ramchandra was in front of Sri Aurobindo, Biren Ghose and Suresh Chakravarti followed keeping a discreet distance. They walked in a zigzag direction towards the river and reached the Ghat on Ganges within ten minutes. A boat was called and Sri Aurobindo got in along with Biren and Suresh; Ramchandra returned. When the boat anchored

at the Strand in Chandernagore, it was still night. Biren and Suresh got out and proceeded to find Charuchandra Roy who had been one of those arrested in the Alipore case. They asked him to make arrangements for Sri Aurobindo's stay. As Charuchandra was hesitating, one Sisir Ghose took them to Motilal Roy, an eminent man of the place. He readily agreed to accommodate Sri Aurobindo and went to welcome him. He had the boat brought near the place where he lived and as soon as Sri Aurobindo disembarked he took him to his house. The two young men quietly returned to Calcutta the next morning in order to avert possible suspicion. Motilal was asked to keep the arrival secret, which he did.

In Motilal's house the honoured guest was first accommodated in the drawing room and then upstairs where furniture was being stocked; the next day he was shifted to a friend's place for reasons of safety; then back to Motilal's. Several other alternatives were tried till at last a convenient house was rented near a Jagannath temple near the Ganges.

Clearly politics was now a thing of the past. Motilal Roy describes how Sri Aurobindo would be always found in meditation and when he spoke it was as if only his lips moved but somebody else spoke. "When I enquired as to why he was always looking upward, his answer was, 'I see some words written and I try to understand their meaning. Even gods living in the subtle planes of existence can as well be seen'.³² During his meditations, he would see certain Deities attending and leaving at the end of the sessions. He was to identify them later at Pondicherry as Ila, Mahi and Saraswati of the Vedic Pantheon.

In the meanwhile, the British Police were at work. A number of anonymous letters were found addressed to Sri Aurobindo's Calcutta address. One of these asked him to come out in the open. He suspected the motive behind it and wrote back stating that he had not left out of fear and that there was no warrant against him; if there were any he would have come out. It appears the Government actually issued a warrant thereafter, confirming his suspicion that the letter was a ruse by an agent of the Government.

The prosecution was pending in Calcutta and there was some talk among friends of sending Sri Aurobindo to France. It was at that juncture that he heard the Voice again:

"Go to Pondicherry."

Sri Aurobindo remarked later: "I could not question it, it was Sri Krishna's *adesh*. I had to obey. Later I found it was for the Ashram, for the Yogic work."³³

He had stayed at Chandernagore so far for about six weeks. Now things started moving rapidly. Motilal Roy was asked to send word to Sukumar Mitra—son of Krishna Kumar Mitra about Sri Aurobindo's decision to leave for Pondicherry. Suresh Chakravarty received instructions from Chandernagore to proceed to Pondicherry and arrange for a house. He carried a letter of introduction to Srinivasachari, associated with the revolutionary group and conducting a Tamil weekly *India* from Pondicherry. Leaving Calcutta on 28th March he reached Pondicherry on the 31st.

Sukumar arranged for a decoy reservation to Colombo to put the police on a false scent. Secretly two passages were booked in the steamer *Dupleix* proceeding from Calcutta to Pondicherry. After a series of misunderstandings and confusion, Sri Aurobindo and his companion Bijoy arrived at the residence of the doctor of the steamship company for the necessary health-certificates. They presented themselves under their assumed names viz. Jyotindranath Mitra and Bankimchandra Basak respectively. The European doctor seems to have commented on Sri Aurobindo's chaste English where upon Sri Aurobindo replied that he had received his education in England.

They arrived where the ship was berthed by 11 p.m. and both the passengers boarded it immediately. The steamer sailed from Calcutta in the early hours of April 1, 1910.

Thus ended one phase of Sri Aurobindo's life. He left politics behind. And why did he do so? He explains candidly:

"I may also say that I did not leave politics because I felt I could do nothing more there, such an idea was very far from me. I came away because I did not want anything to interfere with my Yoga and because I got a very distinct *adesa* in the matter. I have cut connection entirely with politics, but before I did so I knew from within that the work I had begun there was destined to be carried forward, on lines I had foreseen, by others, and that the ultimate triumph of the movement I had initiated was sure without my personal action or presence. There was not the least motive of despair or sense of futility behind my withdrawal."³⁴

It will be of interest to note that a month before leaving Calcutta, in January 1910, Sri Aurobindo prophesied to the correspondent of *India*, the Tamil Nationalist Weekly:

“Since 1907, we have been living in an era which is full of hope for India. Not only India, but the whole world will see sudden upheavals and revolutionary changes. The high will become low and the low high. The oppressed and the depressed will be elevated. The nation and humanity will be animated by a new consciousness, new thought, and new efforts will be made to reach new ends. Amidst these revolutionary changes, India will become free.”³⁵

A General Note on Sri Aurobindo's Political Life*

“**T**HERE WERE THREE sides to Sri Aurobindo's political ideas and activities. *First*, there was the action with which he started, a secret revolutionary propaganda and organisation of which the central object was the preparation of an armed insurrection. *Secondly*, there was a public propaganda intended to convert the whole nation to the ideal of independence which was regarded, when he entered into politics, by the vast majority of Indians as unpractical and impossible, an almost insane chimera. It was thought that the British Empire was too powerful and India too weak, effectively disarmed and impotent even to dream of the success of such an endeavour. *Thirdly*, there was the organisation of the people to carry on a public and united opposition and undermining of the foreign rule through an increasing non-cooperation and passive resistance.

At that time the military organisation of the great empires and their means of military action were not so overwhelming and apparently irresistible as they now are: the rifle was still the decisive weapon, air power had not yet been developed and the force of artillery was not so devastating as it afterwards became. India was disarmed, but Sri Aurobindo thought that with proper organisation and help from outside this difficulty might be overcome and in so vast a country as India and with the smallness of the regular British armies, even a guerrilla warfare accompanied by general resistance and revolt might be effective. There was also the possibility of a general revolt in the Indian army. At the same time he had studied the temperament and characteristics of the British people and the turn of their political instincts, and he believed that although they would resist any attempt at self-liberation by the Indian people and would at the most only concede very slowly such

* From 'Sri Aurobindo on Himself'.

reforms as would not weaken their imperial control, still they were not of the kind which would be ruthlessly adamant to the end: if they found resistance and revolt becoming general and persistent they would, in the end, try to arrive at an accommodation to save what they could of their empire or in an extremity prefer to grant independence, rather than have it forcefully wrested from their hands.

In some quarters there is the idea that Sri Aurobindo's political standpoint was entirely pacifist, that he was opposed in principle and in practice to all violence and that he denounced terrorism, insurrection, etc. as entirely forbidden by the spirit and letter of the Hindu religion. It is even suggested that he was a forerunner of the gospel of Ahimsa. This is quite incorrect. Sri Aurobindo is neither an impotent moralist nor a weak pacifist.

The rule of confining political action to passive resistance was adopted as the best policy for the National Movement at that stage and not as a part of a gospel of non-violence or pacific idealism. Peace is a part of the highest ideal, but it must be spiritual or at the very least psychological in its basis; without a change in human nature it cannot come with any finality. If it is attempted on any other basis (moral principle or gospel of Ahimsa or any other), it will fail and even may leave things worse than before. He is in favour of an attempt to put down war by international agreement and international force, what is now contemplated in the "New Order", if that proves possible, but that would not be Ahimsa, it would be a putting down of an anarchic force by legal force and even then one cannot be sure that it would be permanent. Within nations this sort of peace has been secured, but it does not prevent occasional civil wars and revolutions and political outbreaks and repressions, sometimes of a sanguinary character. The same might happen to a similar world-peace. Sri Aurobindo has never concealed his opinion that a nation is entitled to attain its freedom by violence, if it can do so or if there is no other way: whether it should do so or not, depends on what is the best policy, not on ethical considerations. Sri Aurobindo's position and practice in this matter was the same as Tilak's and that of other Nationalist leaders who were by no means Pacifist or worshippers of Ahimsa.

For the first few years in India, Sri Aurobindo abstained from any political activity (except the writing of the articles in the *Induprakash*) and studied the conditions in the country so that he might be able to

judge more maturely what could be done. Then he made his first move when he sent a young Bengali soldier of the Baroda army, Jatin Banerjee, as his lieutenant to Bengal with a programme of preparation and action which he thought might occupy a period of 30 years before fruition could become possible. As a matter of fact it has taken 50 years for the movement of liberation to arrive at fruition and the beginning of complete success. The idea was to establish secretly or, as far as visible action could be taken, under various pretexts and covers, revolutionary propaganda and recruiting throughout Bengal. This was to be done among the youth of the country while sympathy and support and financial and other assistance were to be obtained from the older men who had advanced views or could be won over to them. Centres were to be established in every town and eventually in every village. Societies of young men were to be established with various ostensible objects, cultural, intellectual or moral and those already existing were to be won over for revolutionary use. Young men were to be trained in activities which might be helpful for ultimate military action, such as riding, physical training, athletics of various kinds, drill and organised movement. As soon as the idea was sown it attained a rapid prosperity; already existing small groups and associations of young men who had not yet the clear idea or any settled programme of revolution began to turn in this direction and a few who had already the revolutionary aim were contacted and soon developed activity on organised lines; the few rapidly became many. Meanwhile Sri Aurobindo had met a member of the Secret Society in Western India, and taken the oath of the Society and had been introduced to the Council in Bombay. His future action was not pursued under any directions by this Council, but he took up on his own responsibility the task of generalising support for its objects in Bengal where as yet it had no membership or following. He spoke of the Society and its aim to P. Mitter and other leading men of the revolutionary group in Bengal and they took the oath of the Society and agreed to carry out its objects on the lines suggested by Sri Aurobindo. The special cover used by Mitter's group was association for lathi play which had already been popularised to some extent by Sarala Ghosal in Bengal among the young men; but other groups used other ostensible covers. Sri Aurobindo's attempt at a close organisation of the whole movement did not succeed, but the movement itself did not suffer by that, for the general idea was taken up and activity of many separate groups led to a greater and more widespread diffusion of the revolutionary drive and

action. Afterwards there came the partition of Bengal and a general outburst of revolt which favoured the rise of the extremist party and the great Nationalist movement. Sri Aurobindo's activities were then turned more and more in this direction and the secret action became a secondary and subordinate element. He took advantage, however, of the Swadeshi movement to popularise the idea of violent revolt in the future. At Barin's suggestion he agreed to the starting of a paper *Yugantar* which was to preach open revolt and the absolute denial of the British rule and include such items as series of articles containing instructions for guerrilla warfare. Sri Aurobindo himself wrote some of the opening articles in the early numbers and he always exercised a general control; when a member of the sub-editorial staff, Swami Vivekananda's brother, presented himself on his own motion to the police in a search as the editor of the paper and was prosecuted, the *Yugantar* under Sri Aurobindo's orders adopted the policy of refusing to defend itself in a British Court on the ground that it did not recognise the foreign Government and this immensely increased the prestige and influence of the paper. It had as its chief writers and directors three of the ablest younger writers in Bengal, and it at once acquired an immense influence throughout Bengal. It may be noted that the Secret Society did not include terrorism in its programme, but this element grew up in Bengal as a result of the strong repression and the reaction to it in that Province.

The public activity of Sri Aurobindo began with the writing of the articles in the *Induprakash*. These seven articles written at the instance of K. G. Deshpande, editor of the paper, and Sri Aurobindo's Cambridge friend, under the caption 'New Lamps for Old', vehemently denounced the then Congress policy of pray, petition and protest and called for a dynamic leadership based upon self-help and fearlessness. But this outspoken and irrefutable criticism was checked by the action of a Moderate leader who frightened the editor and thus prevented any full development of his ideas in the paper; he had to turn aside to generalities such as the necessity of extending the activities of the Congress beyond the circle of the bourgeois or middle class and calling into it the masses. Finally, Sri Aurobindo suspended all public activity of this kind and worked only in secret till 1905, but he contacted Tilak whom he regarded as the one possible leader for a revolutionary party and met him at the Ahmedabad Congress; there Tilak took him out of the pandal and talked to him for an hour in the grounds expressing his contempt for the

Reformist movement and explaining his own line of action in Maharashtra.

Sri Aurobindo included in the scope of his revolutionary work one kind of activity which afterwards became an important item in the public programme of the Nationalist party. He encouraged the young men in the centres of work to propagate the Swadeshi idea which at the time was only in its infancy and hardly more than a fad of the few. One of the ablest men in these revolutionary groups was a Maharatta named Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar who was an able writer in Bengali (his family had been long domiciled in Bengal) and who had written a popular *Life of Shivaji* in Bengali in which he first brought in the name of Swaraj afterwards adopted by the Nationalists as their word for independence—Swaraj became one item of the four-fold Nationalist programme. He published a book entitled *Deshar Katha* describing in exhaustive detail the British commercial and industrial exploitation of India. This book had an immense repercussion in Bengal, captured the mind of young Bengal and assisted more than anything else in the preparation of the Swadeshi movement. Sri Aurobindo himself had always considered the shaking off of this economic yoke and the development of Indian trade and industry as a necessary concomitant of the revolutionary endeavour.

As long as he was in the Baroda service, Sri Aurobindo could not take part publicly in politics. Apart from that, he preferred to remain and act and even to lead from behind the scenes without his name being known in public; it was the Government's action in prosecuting him as editor of the *Bande Mataram* that forced him into public view. And from that time onward he became openly, what he had been for sometime already, a prominent leader of the Nationalist party, its principal leader in action in Bengal and the organiser there of its policy and strategy. He had decided in his mind the lines on which he wanted the country's action to run: what he planned was very much the same as was developed afterwards in Ireland as the Sinn Fein movement; but Sri Aurobindo did not derive his ideas, as some have represented, from Ireland, for the Irish movement became prominent later and he knew nothing of it till after he had withdrawn to Pondicherry. There was, moreover, a capital difference between India and Ireland which made his work much more difficult; for all its past history had accustomed the Irish people to rebellion against British rule and this history might be

even described as a constant struggle for independence intermittent in its action but permanently there in Principle; there was nothing of this kind in India. Sri Aurobindo had to establish and generalise the idea of independence in the mind of the Indian people and at the same time to push first a party and then the whole nation into an intense and organised political activity which would lead to the accomplishment of that ideal. His idea was to capture the Congress and to make it an instrument for revolutionary action instead of a centre of a timid constitutional agitation which would only talk and pass resolutions and recommendations to the foreign Government; if the Congress could not be captured, then a central revolutionary body would have to be created which could do this work. It was to be a sort of State within the State giving its directions to the people and creating organised bodies and institutions which would be its means of action; there must be an increasing non-cooperation and passive resistance which would render the administration of the country by a foreign Government difficult or finally impossible, a universal unrest which would wear down repression and finally, if need be, an open revolt all over the country. This plan included a boycott of British trade, the substitution of national schools for the Government institutions, the creation of arbitration courts to which the people could resort instead of depending on the ordinary courts of law, the creation of volunteer forces which would be the nucleus of an army of open revolt, and all other action that would make the programme complete. The part Sri Aurobindo took publicly in Indian politics was of brief duration, for he turned aside from it in 1910 and withdrew to Pondicherry; much of his programme lapsed in his absence, but enough had been done to change the whole face of Indian politics and the whole spirit of the Indian people, to make independence its aim and non-cooperation and resistance its method, and even an imperfect application of this policy heightening into sporadic periods of revolt has been sufficient to bring about the victory. The course of subsequent events followed largely the line of Sri Aurobindo's idea. The Congress was finally captured by the Nationalist party, declared independence its aim, organised itself for action, took almost the whole nation minus a majority of the Mohammedans and a minority of the depressed classes into acceptance of its leadership and eventually formed the first national Government in India and secured from Britain acceptance of independence for India.

At first Sri Aurobindo took part in Congress politics only from behind the scenes, as he had not yet decided to leave the Baroda Service; but

he took long leave without pay in which besides carrying on personally the secret revolutionary work, he attended the Barisal Conference broken up by the police and toured East Bengal along with Bepin Pal and associated himself closely with the forward group in the Congress. It was during this period that he joined Bepin Pal in the editing of the *Bande Mataram*, founded the new political party in Bengal and attended the Congress session at Calcutta at which the Extremists, though still a minority, succeeded under the leadership of Tilak in imposing part of their political programme on the Congress. The founding of the Bengal National College gave him the opportunity he needed and enabled him to resign his position in the Baroda Service and join the college as its Principal. Subodh Mullick, one of Sri Aurobindo's collaborators in his secret action and afterwards also in Congress politics, in whose house he usually lived when he was in Calcutta, had given a lakh of rupees for this foundation and had stipulated that Sri Aurobindo should be given a post of professor in the college with a salary of Rs. 150; so he was now free to give his whole time to the service of the country. Bepin Pal, who had been long expounding a policy of self-help and non-cooperation in his weekly journal, now started a daily with the name of *Bande Mataram*, but it was likely to be a brief adventure since he began with only Rs. 500 in his pocket and no firm assurance of financial assistance in the future. He asked Sri Aurobindo to join him in this venture to which a ready consent was given, for now Sri Aurobindo saw his opportunity for starting the public propaganda necessary for his revolutionary purpose. He called a meeting of the forward group of young men in the Congress and decided then to organise themselves openly as a new political party joining hands with the corresponding group in Maharashtra under the proclaimed leadership of Tilak and to join battle with the Moderate party which was done at the Calcutta session. He also persuaded them to take up the *Bande Mataram* daily as their party organ and a *Bande Mataram* Company was started to finance the paper, whose direction Sri Aurobindo undertook during the absence of Bepin Pal who was sent on a tour in the districts to proclaim the purpose and programme of the new party. The new party was at once successful and the *Bande Mataram* paper began to circulate throughout India. On its staff were not only Bepin Pal and Sri Aurobindo but some other very able writers, Shyam Sundar Chakravarty, Hemendra Prasad Ghose and Bejoy Chatterjee. Shyam Sundar and Bejoy were masters of the English language, each with a style of his own; Shyam

Sundar caught up something like Sri Aurobindo's way of writing and later on many took his articles for Sri Aurobindo's. But after a time dissensions arose between Bepin Pal on one side and the other contributors and the directors of the Company because of temperamental incompatibility and differences of political views especially with regard to the secret revolutionary action with which others sympathised but to which Bepin Pal was opposed. This ended soon with Bepin Pal's separation from the journal. Sri Aurobindo would not have consented to this departure, for he regarded the qualities of Pal as a great asset to the *Bande Mataram*, since Pal, though not a man of action or capable of political leadership, was perhaps the best and most original political thinker in the country, an excellent writer and a magnificent orator; but the separation was effected behind Sri Aurobindo's back when he was convalescing from a dangerous attack of fever. His name was even announced without his consent in *Bande Mataram* as editor but for one day only, as he immediately put a stop to it since he was still formally in the Baroda service and in no way eager to have his name brought forward in public. Henceforward, however, he controlled the policy of the *Bande Mataram* along with that of the party in Bengal. Bepin Pal had stated the aim of the new party as complete self-government free from British control: but this could have meant or at least included the Moderate aim of colonial self-government and Dadabhai Naoroji as President of the Calcutta session of the Congress had actually tried to capture the name of *Swaraj*, the Extremists' term of independence, for this colonial self-government, Sri Aurobindo's first preoccupation was to declare openly for complete and absolute independence as the aim of political action in India and to insist on this persistently in the pages of the journal; he was the first politician in India who had the courage to do this in public and he was immediately successful. The party took up the word *Swaraj* to express its own ideal of independence and it soon spread everywhere; but it was taken up as the ideal of the Congress much later on at the Karachi session of that body when it had been reconstituted and renovated under Nationalist leadership. The journal declared and developed a new political programme for the country as the programme of the Nationalist party, non-cooperation, passive resistance, *Swadeshi*, Boycott, national education, settlement of disputes in law by popular arbitration and other items of Sri Aurobindo's plan. Sri Aurobindo published in the paper a series of articles on passive resistance, another developing a

political philosophy of revolution and wrote many leaders aimed at destroying this shibboleths and superstitions of the Moderate Party, such as the belief in British justice and benefits bestowed by foreign government in India, Faith in British law courts and in the adequacy of the education given in schools and universities in India and stressed more strongly and persistently than had been done the emasculation, stagnation or slow progress, poverty, economic dependence, absence of a rich industrial activity and all other evil results of a foreign government; he insisted especially that even if an alien rule were benevolent and beneficent that could not be a substitute for a free and healthy national life. Assisted by this publicity the ideas of the Nationalists gained ground everywhere, especially in the Punjab which had before been predominantly moderate. The *Bande Mataram* was almost unique in journalistic history in the influence it exercised in converting the mind of a people and preparing it for revolution. But its weakness was on the financial side; for the Extremists were still a poor man's party. So long as Sri Aurobindo was there in active control, he managed with great difficulty to secure sufficient public support for running the paper, but not for expanding it as he wanted, and when he was arrested and held in jail for a year, the economic situation of *Bande Mataram* became desperate: finally, it was decided that the journal should die a glorious death than perish by starvation and Bejoy Chatterjee was commissioned to write an article for which the Government would certainly stop the publication of the paper. Sri Aurobindo had always takes care to give no handle in the editorial articles of the *Bande Mataram* either for a prosecution for sedition or any other drastic action fatal to its existence; an editor of the *Statesman* complained that the paper reeked with sedition patently visible between every line, but it was so skilfully written that no legal action could be taken. The manoeuvre succeeded and the life of the *Bande Mataram* came to an end in Sri Aurobindo's absence.

The nationalist programme could only achieve a partial beginning before it was temporarily broken by severe government repression. Its most important practical item was Swadeshi plus Boycott; for Swadeshi much was done to make the idea general and a few beginnings were made, but the greater results showed themselves only afterwards in the course of time. Sri Aurobindo was anxious that this part of the movement should be not only propagated in idea but given a practical organisation and an effective force. He wrote from Baroda asking whether it would

not be possible to bring in the industrialists and manufacturers and gain the financial support of landed magnates and create an organisation in which men of industrial and commercial ability and experience and not politicians alone could direct operations and devise means of carrying out the policy; but he was told that it was impossible the industrialists and the landed magnates were too timid to join in the movement, and the big commercial men were all interested in the import of British goods and therefore on the side of the status quo: so he had to abandon his idea of the organisation of Swadeshi and Boycott. Both Tilak and Sri Aurobindo were in favour of an effective boycott of British goods—but of British goods only; for there was little in the country to replace foreign articles: so they recommended the substitution for the British of foreign goods from Germany and Austria and America so that the fullest pressure might be brought upon England. They wanted the Boycott to be a political weapon and not merely an aid to Swadeshi; the total boycott of all foreign goods was an impracticable idea and the very limited application of it recommended in Congress resolutions was too small to be politically effective. They were for national self-sufficiency in key industries, the production of necessities and of all manufactures of which India had the natural means, but complete self-sufficiency of autarchy did not seem practicable or even desirable since a free India would need to export goods as well as supply them for internal consumption and for that she must import as well and maintain an international exchange. But the sudden enthusiasm for the boycott of all foreign goods was wide and sweeping and the leaders had to conform to this popular cry and be content with the impulse it gave to the Swadeshi idea. National education was another item to which Sri Aurobindo attached much importance. He had been disgusted with the education given by the British system in the schools and colleges and universities, a system of which as a professor in the Baroda College he had full experience. He felt that it tended to dull and impoverish and tie up the naturally quick and brilliant and supple Indian intelligence, to teach it bad intellectual habits and spoil by narrow information and mechanical instruction its originality and productivity. The movement began well and many national schools were established in Bengal and many able men became teachers, but still the development was insufficient and the economical position of the schools precarious. Sri Aurobindo had decided to take up the movement personally and see whether it could not be given a greater expansion and a stronger

foundation, but his departure from Bengal cut short this plan. In the repression and the general depression caused by it, most of the schools failed to survive. The idea lived on and it may be hoped that it will one day find an adequate form and body. The idea of people's courts was taken up and worked in some districts, not without success, but this too perished in the storm. The idea of volunteer groupings had a stronger vitality; it lived on, took shape, multiplied its formation and its workers were the spearhead of the movement of direct action which broke out from time to time in the struggle for freedom. The purely political elements of the Nationalist programme and activities were those which lasted and after each wave of repression and depression renewed the thread of the life of the movement for liberation and kept it recognisably one throughout nearly fifty years of its struggle. But the greatest thing done in those years was the creation of a new spirit in the country. In the enthusiasm that swept surging everywhere with the cry of *Bande Mataram* ringing on all sides men felt it glorious to be alive and dare and act together and hope; the old apathy and timidity was broken and a force created which nothing could destroy and which rose again and again in wave after wave till it carried India to the beginning of a complete victory.

After the *Bande Mataram* case, Sri Aurobindo became the recognised leader of Nationalism in Bengal. He led the party at the session of the Bengal Provincial Conference at Midnapore where there was a vehement clash between the two parties. He now for the first time became a speaker on the public platform, addressed large meetings at Surat and presided over the Nationalist conference there. He stopped at several places on his way back to Calcutta and was the speaker at large meetings called to hear him. He led the party again at the session of the Provincial Conference at Hooghly. There it became evident for the first time that Nationalism was gaining the ascendant, for it commanded a majority among the delegates and in the Subjects Committee Sri Aurobindo was able to defeat the Moderates' Resolution welcoming the Reforms and pass his own resolution stigmatising them as utterly inadequate and unreal and rejecting them. But the Moderate leaders threatened to secede if this was maintained and to avoid a scission he consented to allow the Moderate resolution to pass, but spoke at the public session explaining his decision and asking the Nationalists to acquiesce in it in spite of their victory so as to keep some unity in the political forces of Bengal. The Nationalist delegates, at first

triumphant and clamorous, accepted the decision and left the hall quietly at Sri Aurobindo's order so that they might not have to vote either for or against the Moderate resolution. This caused much amazement and discomfiture in the minds of the Moderate leaders who complained that the people had refused to listen to their old and tried leaders and clamoured against them, but at the bidding of a young man new to politics they had obeyed in disciplined silence as if a single body.

About this period Sri Aurobindo had decided to take up charge of a Bengali daily, *Nava Shakti*, and had moved from his rented house in Scotts Lane, where he had been living with his wife and sister, to rooms in the office of the newspaper, and there, before he could begin this new venture, early one morning while he was still sleeping, the police charged up the stairs, revolver in hand, and arrested him. He was taken to the police station and thence to Alipore Jail where he remained for a year during the magistrate's investigation and the trial in the Sessions Court at Alipore. At first he was lodged for some time in a solitary cell but afterwards transferred to a large section of the jail where he lived in one huge room with the other prisoners in the case; subsequently, after the assassination of the approver in the jail, all the prisoners were confined in contiguous but separate cells and met only in the court or in the daily exercise where they could not speak to each other. It was in the second period that Sri Aurobindo made the acquaintance of most of his fellow accused. In the jail he spent almost all his time in reading the Gita and the Upanishads and in intensive meditation and the practice of Yoga. This he pursued even in the second interval when he had no opportunity of being alone and had to accustom himself to meditation amid general talk and laughter, the playing of games and much noise and disturbance; in the first and third periods he had full opportunity and used it to the full. In the Sessions Court the accused were confined in a large prisoner's cage and here during the whole day he remained absorbed in his meditation attending little to the trial and hardly listening to the evidence. C. R. Das, one of his Nationalist collaborators and a famous lawyer, had put aside his large practice and devoted himself for months to the defence of Sri Aurobindo, who left the case entirely to him and troubled no more about it; for he had been assured from within and knew that he would be acquitted. During this period his view of life was radically changed; he had taken up Yoga with the original idea of acquiring spiritual force and energy and divine guidance for his work in life. But

now the inner spiritual life and realisation which had continually been increasing in magnitude and universality and assuming a large place took him up entirely and his work become a part and result of it and besides far exceeded the service and liberation of the country and fixed itself in an aim, previously only glimpsed, which was world-wide in its bearing and concerned with the whole future of humanity.

When he came out from jail Sri Aurobindo found the whole political aspect of the country altered; most of the Nationalist leaders were in jail or in self-imposed exile and there was a general discouragement and depression, though the feeling in the country had not ceased but was only suppressed and was growing by its suppression. He determined to continue the struggle; he held weekly meetings in Calcutta, but the attendance which had numbered formerly thousands full of enthusiasm, was now only of hundreds and had no longer the same force and life. He also went to places in the districts to speak and at one of these delivered his speech at Uttarpara in which for the first time he spoke publicly of his Yoga and his spiritual experiences. He started also two weeklies, one in English and one in Bengali, the *Karmayogin* and *Dharma* which had a fairly large circulation and were, unlike the *Bande Mataram*, easily self-supporting. He attended and spoke at the Provincial Conference at Barisal in 1909: for in Bengal owing to the compromise at Hooghly the two parties had not split altogether apart and both joined in the Conference though there could be no representatives of the Nationalist party at the meeting of the Central Moderate body which had taken the place of the Congress. Surendranath Banerjee had indeed called a private conference attended by Sri Aurobindo and one or two other leaders of the Nationalists to discuss a project of uniting the two parties at the session in Benaras and giving a joint fight to the dominant right wing of the Moderates; for he had always dreamt of becoming again leader of a united Bengal with the Extremist party as his strong right arm: but that would have necessitated the nationalists being appointed as delegates by the Bengal Moderates and accepting the constitution imposed at Surat. This Sri Aurobindo refused to do; he demanded a change in that constitution enabling newly formed associations to elect delegates so that the Nationalists might independently send their representatives to the All-India session and on this point the negotiations broke down. Sri Aurobindo began however to consider how to revive the national

movement under the changed circumstances. He glanced at the possibility of falling back on a Home Rule movement which the Government could not repress, but this, which was actually realised by Mrs. Besant later on, would have meant a postponement and a falling back from the ideal of independence. He looked also at the possibility of an intense and organised passive resistance movement in the manner afterwards adopted by Gandhi. He saw, however, that he himself could not be the leader of such a movement.

At no time did he consent to have anything to do with the sham Reforms which were all the Government at that period cared to offer. He held up always the slogan of 'no compromise' or as he now put it in his Open Letter to his countrymen published in the *Karmayogin* 'no cooperation without control'. It was only if real political, administrative and financial control were given to popular ministers in an elected Assembly that he would have anything to do with offers from the British Government. Of this he saw no sign until the proposal of the Montagu Reforms in which first something of the kind seemed to appear. He foresaw that the British Government would have to begin trying to meet the national aspiration halfway, but he would not anticipate that moment before it actually came. The Montagu Reforms came nine years after Sri Aurobindo had retired to Pondicherry and by that time he had abandoned all outward and public political activity in order to devote himself to his spiritual work, acting only by his spiritual force on the movement in India, until his prevision of real negotiations between British Government and the Indian leaders was fulfilled by Cripps' Proposal and the events that came after.

Meanwhile, the Government were determined to get rid of Sri Aurobindo as the only considerable obstacle left to the success of their repressive policy. As they could not send him to the Andamans they decided to deport him. This came to the knowledge of Sister Nivedita and she informed Sri Aurobindo and asked him to leave British India and work from outside so that his work would not be stopped or totally interrupted, Sri Aurobindo contented himself with publishing in the *Karmayogin* a signed article in which he spoke of the project of deportation and left the country what he called his last will and testament; he felt sure that this would kill the idea of deportation and in fact it so turned out. Deportation left aside, the Government could only wait for some opportunity for prosecution for sedition and this chance

came to them when Sri Aurobindo published in the same paper another signed article reviewing the political situation. The article was sufficiently moderate in its tone and later on the High Court refused to regard it as seditious and acquitted the printer. Sri Aurobindo one night at the *Karmayogin* office received information of the Government's intention to search the office and arrest him. While considering what should be his attitude, he received a sudden command from above to go to Chandernagore in French India. He obeyed the command at once, for it was now his rule to move only as he was moved by the divine guidance and never to resist and depart from it; he did not stay to consult with anyone, but in ten minutes was at the river ghat in a boat plying on the Ganges, in a few hours he was at Chandernagore where he went into secret residence. He sent a message to Sister Nivedita asking her to take up the editing of the *Karmayogin* in his absence. This was the end of his active connection with his two journals. At Chandernagore he plunged entirely into solitary meditation and ceased all other activity. Then there came to him a call to proceed to Pondicherry. A boat manned by some young revolutionaries of Uttarpara took him to Calcutta; there he boarded the *Dupleix* and reached Pondicherry on April 4, 1910.

At Pondicherry, from this time onwards Sri Aurobindo's practice of Yoga became more and absorbing. He dropped all participation in any public political activity, refused more than one request to preside at sessions of the restored Indian National Congress and made a rule of abstention from any public utterance of any kind not connected with his spiritual activities or any contribution of writings or articles except what he wrote afterwards in the *Arya*. For some years he kept up some private communication with the revolutionary forces he had led through one or two individuals, but this also he dropped after a time and his abstention from any kind of participation in politics became complete. As his vision of the future grew clearer, he saw that the eventual independence of India was assured by the march of forces of which he became aware, that Britain would be compelled by the pressure of Indian resistance and by the pressure of international events to concede independence and that she was already moving towards that eventuality with whatever opposition and reluctance. He felt that there would be no need of armed insurrection and that the secret preparation for it could be dropped without injury to the nationalist cause, although the revolutionary spirit had to be maintained and would be maintained

intact. His own personal intervention in politics would therefore be no longer indispensable. Apart from all this, the magnitude of the spiritual work set before him became more and more clear to him, and he saw that the concentration of all his energies on it was necessary. Accordingly, when the Ashram came into existence, he kept it free from all political connections of action; even when he intervened in politics twice afterwards on special occasions, this intervention was purely personal and the Ashram was not concerned in it. The British Government and numbers of people besides could not believe that Sri Aurobindo had ceased from all political action and it was supposed by them that he was secretly participating in revolutionary activities and even creating a secret organisation in the security of French India. But all this was pure imagination and rumour and there was nothing of the kind. His retirement from political activity was complete, just as was his personal retirement into solitude in 1910.

But this did not mean, as most people supposed, that he had retired into some height of spiritual experience devoid of any further interest in the world or in the fate of India. It could not mean that, for the very principle of his Yoga was not only to realise the Divine and attain to a complete spiritual consciousness, but also to take all life and all world activity into the scope of this spiritual consciousness and action and to base life on the Spirit and give it a spiritual meaning. In his retirement Sri Aurobindo kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world and in India and actively intervened whenever necessary, but solely with a spiritual force and silent spiritual action; for it is part of the experience of those who have advanced far in Yoga that besides the ordinary forces and activities of the mind and life and body in Matter, there are other forces and powers that can act and do act from behind and from above; there is also a spiritual dynamic power which can be possessed by those who are advanced in the spiritual consciousness, though all do not care to possess or, possessing, to use it, and this power is greater than any other and more effective. It was this force which, as soon as he had attained to it, he used, at first only in a limited field of personal work, but afterwards in a constant action upon the world forces. He had no reason to be dissatisfied with the results or to feel the necessity of any other kind of action. Twice however he found it advisable to take in addition other action of a public kind. The first was in relation to the Second World War. At the beginning he did not actively concern

himself with it, but when it appeared as if Hitler would crush all the forces opposed to him and Nazism dominate the world, he began to intervene. He declared himself publicly on the side of the Allies, made some financial contributions in answer to the appeal for funds and encouraged those who sought his advice to enter the army or share in the war effort. Inwardly, he put his spiritual force behind the Allies from the moment of Dunkirk when everybody was expecting the immediate fall of England and the definite triumph of Hitler; and he had the satisfaction of seeing the rush of German victory almost immediately arrested and the tide of war begin to turn in the opposite direction. This he did, because he saw that behind Hitler and Nazism were dark Asuric forces and that their success would mean the enslavement of mankind to the tyranny of evil, and a set-back to the course of evolution and especially to the spiritual evolution of mankind: it would lead also to the enslavement not only of Europe but of Asia, and in it of India, an enslavement far more terrible than any this country had ever endured, and the undoing of all the work that had been done for her liberation. It was this reason also that induced him to support publicly the Cripps offer and to press the Congress leaders to accept it. He had not, for various reasons, intervened with his spiritual force against the Japanese aggression until it became evident that Japan intended to attack and even invade and conquer India. He allowed certain letters he had written in support of the war affirming his views of the Asuric nature and inevitable outcome of Hitlerism to become public. He supported the Cripps offer because by its acceptance India and Britain could stand united against the Asuric forces and the solution of Cripps could be used as a step towards independence. When negotiations failed, Sri Aurobindo returned to his reliance on the use of spiritual force alone against the aggressor and had the satisfaction of seeing the tide of Japanese victory, which had till then swept everything before it, change immediately into a tide of rapid, crushing and finally immense and overwhelming defeat. He had also after a time the satisfaction of seeing his previsions about the future of India justify themselves so that she stands independent with whatever internal difficulties.”

Yoga

PONDICHERRY (1910-1950)

Arrival in Pondicherry

B EING A FRENCH Enclave, Pondicherry had become a resort of many political figures who needed to escape the attentions of the British police. Poet Subramania Bharati was the most prominent among these exiles who had come to Pondicherry and a group had formed around him. Srinivasachari, and his brother Tirumalachari, who were associated with him, ran a few journals in Tamil viz. *India, Karmayogi, Vijaya, Bala Bharata*. Suresh Chakravarty (alias Moni), who arrived on 31st March with a letter for Srinivasachari intimating the imminent arrival of Sri Aurobindo, found himself in a piquant situation. For everybody in the group found it hard to believe that such a great and prominent person like Sri Aurobindo would seek asylum in an obscure place like Pondicherry. They suspected some mischief, could he be a spy? They had difficulties enough with the attentions of the police from Madras. But it could as well be that the messenger was genuine and the letter authentic. They could not rule it out. And if Sri Aurobindo did arrive, it was but fitting that they should offer him a public reception. Thus they hesitated for a couple of days. Ultimately Moni prevailed upon them to believe him; only they were asked not to arrange any public reception as Sri Aurobindo had left Calcutta in secret and he would want to remain in seclusion, at least for the time being. It was then agreed that they would arrange for and receive the distinguished guest. But even on the final day, Moni was not told where Sri Aurobindo would be lodged.

Sri Aurobindo arrived at four p.m. on April 4, 1910. The time juncture may be noted: month 4, day 4, hour 4 after the meridian. The number 4 has an occult significance: 'Supramental Realisation in the Physical'.

Disembarking from the steamer, Sri Aurobindo and his companion, Bejoy Nag, walked down the pier to Cours Chabrol from where they were escorted by Moni, Srinivasachari, Bharati and Calve Shankara Chetty, in a Jutka (horse-carriage) to the house of Shankara Chetty in

Coumoutty Street, the very house where Swami Vivekananda had stayed before.

News of Sri Aurobindo's arrival in Pondicherry reached the authorities within a week of his sailing from Calcutta. On coming to know of it, his colleagues Monoranjan Guha Thakurata and Shyam Sundar Chakravarty wrote to him asking for his continued guidance in politics. *Sri Aurobindo replied to say that Sri Krishna had taken the responsibility of freeing India.* He himself had cut off all connection with politics. It only required that all should act from a firm status in Yoga.

At Shankara Chetty's

THE HOUSE WAS a large one and Sri Aurobindo occupied a room on the top floor. Moni and Bejoy stayed in the same house. The host would send food for the guests and Sri Aurobindo mostly stayed confined to his room. He came down only for his bath. He did not wish to be disturbed by visitors and it was all quiet. The party stayed in this house till October 1910.

Later some select persons were allowed to meet him. Among them was M. Mouttayan, secretary of the local Theosophical Lodge (and also a Government Official). He was one of the few who had assembled in the compound of Shankara Chetty's house and watched Sri Aurobindo walk in on the day of his arrival. Sri Aurobindo told him: "Both Annie Besant and I had the same vision. I interpret it in one way and she in another."

An unusual visitor came from France. He was M. Paul Richard who had come to Pondicherry—a French territory—to campaign for his friend Paul Bluyson's election to the French Chamber. He seemed to have desired to meet a Yogi and Zir Naidu a leading citizen of the town, arranged for him to meet Sri Aurobindo. The two met twice and had wide ranging talks. He had brought with him a sketch of a Yoga Chakra (mystic symbol) that his wife, Mirra had been seeing in her occult visions. It was also the Jewish symbol, known as the Star of David or the Seal of Solomon. It has two intersecting isosceles triangles. This was Sri Aurobindo's own symbol representing the triple aspiration of the Earth and the answering Grace from above.

Richard also asked about the significance of the Lotus. Sri Aurobindo told him that the Lotus stood for the opening of the consciousness to the Divine. These meetings had, obviously, left a deep impression on

the visitor. For some Years later, he declared before an audience in Japan:

“The hour is coming of great things, of great events, and also of great men, the divine men of Asia. All my life I have sought for them across the world, for all my life I have felt they must exist somewhere in the world, that this world would die if they did not live. For they are its light, its heat, its life. It is in Asia that I found the greatest among them—the leader, the hero of tomorrow. He is a Hindu. His name is Aurobindo Ghose.”¹

In the evenings of the first few months there were sessions of automatic writing. The book *Yogic Sadhan* was written, in the course of seven or eight days, in this manner, Sri Aurobindo used to see before him the image of Ram Mohun Roy both before and after the writing. On the last day he saw the figure disappearing from a corner of the ceiling of the room. Sri Aurobindo disclaimed responsibility for its authorship. He wrote only the Editor's epilogue and the Editor's name was given as Uttara Yogi. and thereby hangs a tale.

The book was published in a number of editions as authored by Sri Aurobindo and it was only in 1927 that it was withdrawn from circulation. Sri Aurobindo writes of it: “*Yogic Sadhan* is not my composition, nor its contents the essence of my Yoga, whatever the publishers may persist in saying in their lying blurb, in spite of protests.”²

V. Ramaswami Iyengar (Va Ra) as he was popularly known was another visitor. A noted writer in Tamil and a fiery patriot, he had been sent by the Zamindar of Kodialam, Rangaswami Iyengar, to ascertain if Sri Aurobindo really meant to live in Pondicherry. Va Ra went to Sri Aurobindo with Subramania Bharati. There is a more than usual interest attached to this meeting. For Sri Aurobindo had actually seen him earlier in his subtle vision, though with an important difference. He explains: “..a certain V. Ramaswami whom I had to meet, but I saw him not as he was when he actually came, but as he became after a year's residence in my house. He became the very image of that vision, a face close-cropped, rough, rude, energetic, the very opposite of the dreamy smooth-faced enthusiastic Vaishnava who came to see me. So that was the vision of a man I had never seen, but as he was to be in the future—a prophetic vision.”³

K. V. Rangaswami Iyengar followed. There was a history behind his visit. His family had been devoted to a Yogi, Nagai Japata, as their Guru. As the time for his passing came near, the Yogi called his devotees to him. Iyengar asked him whom he should follow thenceforth for his spiritual guidance. The Yogi kept silent for a while and then said that a great Yogi would come from the north, seeking refuge in the South and he would be known for "three sayings" of his. He would be the guide.

When K. V. R. Iyengar learnt that Sri Aurobindo had come to Pondicherry seeking asylum, he felt that here was the Uttara Yogi of whom Japata had spoken. If further proof was required it was clear in the "three madresses" that Sri Aurobindo had spoken of in his famous letter to his wife—so widely publicised during the Alipore trial, Sri Aurobindo notes in reply to a correspondent: "The Yogi from the North, (Uttara Yogi) was my own name given to me because of a prediction made long ago by a famous Tamil Yogi, that thirty years later (agreeing with the time of my arrival) a Yogi from the North would come as a fugitive to the South and practise there an integral Yoga (Poorna Yoga), and this would be one sign of the approaching liberty of India. He gave three utterances as the mark by which this Yogi could be recognised and all these were found in the letters to my wife."⁴

The Zamindar rendered immediate financial assistance and assured further help—a risky undertaking in those days of suspicion and political harassment. He also undertook to get printed the book *Yogic Sadhan* and supplied copies to Sri Aurobindo.

While in Shankara Chetty's house, Sri Aurobindo went on another fast, the earlier one being in the Alipore Jail. Answering a question whether one cannot do without food at all, he says: "When I did my fast of about twenty-three days in Chetty's house, I very nearly solved the problem. I could walk eight hours a day as usual, I continued my mental work and sadhana as usual and I found that I was not in the least weak at the end of twenty-three days. But the flesh began to grow less and I did not find a clue to replacing the very matter reduced in the body. Also, when I broke the fast, I did not observe the rule of people who undergo long fasts—beginning with a little food and so on. I began with the same quantity as I used to take before.

“I tried fasting once in jail, but that was for ten days when I used to sleep once in three nights. I lost ten pounds in weight but I felt stronger at the end of ten days than I was before I began the fast. I could lift up a weight, after the fast, which I could not before. It was not for conquering sleep that I began the waking experiment, but because there was pressure of Sadhana and I liked to do Sadhana than sleep.”

In another context he explains how one can draw energy from the vital plane instead of depending upon physical substance. But obviously, there is a limit to the extent one can ignore the physical law of nutrition—at any rate under the present organisation of things in nature.

Letter to *The Hindu*

SRI AUROBINDO MOVED to a house in Rue Suffren in the month of October 1910. The house belonged to Sunder Chetty and was smaller. He lived there till April 1911.

He was joined in November 1910 by Nolini Kanta Gupta who was associated with him at Calcutta in the revolutionary movement. Nolini Kanta came to have a special relation with Sri Aurobindo who taught him Latin, Greek, French and took special interest in his growth. Nolinida—as he has been affectionately known—became, in due course, Secretary to Sri Aurobindo and the General Secretary of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. He is recognised as a deep thinker and an effective writer in English and Bengali. Sri Aurobindo always thought highly of his clarity of thought and the classic quality of his style.

Saurin Bose, a cousin of Mrinalini Devi, had joined Sri Aurobindo in September 1910.

It has been mentioned earlier how the Government had decided to prosecute Sri Aurobindo for sedition for his signed letter in the *Karmayogin* of 25 December 1909. Arrangements had been made to search the *Karmayogin* office and a warrant for the arrest of Sri Aurobindo was ready. But Sri Aurobindo having left earlier and nothing objectionable being found in the search, the warrant was kept suspended; they decided to prosecute the printer of the journal, Manmohan Ghose, for the publication of the seditious matter. The lower court found him guilty but an appeal to the High Court was preferred. The judgment was delivered on November 7, 1910 setting aside the conviction and acquitting the printer. It was against this background and connected developments that Sri Aurobindo found it necessary to write to *The Hindu*, Madras, the following letter on November 7, 1910:

“I shall be obliged if you will allow me to inform every one interested in my whereabouts through your journal that I am and will remain in

Pondicherry. I left British India over a month before proceedings were taken against me and, as I had purposely retired here in order to pursue my Yogic sadhana undisturbed by political action or pursuit and had already severed connection with my political work, I did not feel called upon to surrender on the warrant for sedition, as might have been incumbent on me if I had remained in the political field. I have since lived here as a religious recluse, visited only by a few friends, French and Indian, but my whereabouts have been an open secret, long known to the agents of the Government and widely rumoured in Madras as well as perfectly well-known to every one in Pondicherry. I find myself now compelled somewhat against my will, to give my presence here a wider publicity. It has suited certain people for an ulterior object to construct a theory that I am not in Pondicherry, but in British India, and I wish to state emphatically that I have not been in British India since March last and shall not set foot on British territory even for a single moment in the future until I can return publicly. Any statement by any person to the contrary made now or in the future, will be false. I wish, at the same time, to make it perfectly clear that I have retired for the time from political activity of any kind and that I will see and correspond with no one in connection with political subjects. I defer all explanation or justification of my action in leaving British India until the High Court in Calcutta shall have pronounced on the culpability or innocence of the writing in the *Karmayogin* on which I am indicted."

Life in the hired house at Rue Suffren was hard. The members of the household cooked by turns and the food was spartan. There was just a camp cot for Sri Aurobindo, a table and two chairs.

He Knows Latin, He Knows Greek

IN APRIL 1911, Sri Aurobindo moved to another house, belonging to Raghava Chetty, in Rue St. Louis. He lived there for full two years.

During the year 1911 Motilal Roy, who had looked after Sri Aurobindo in Chandernagore, visited Pondicherry and stayed for a month and a half. He had received certain instructions, including a Mantra, from Sri Aurobindo and his visit was an occasion for further communications in Sadhana. It was arranged that he would meet Sri Aurobindo twice a week, entering the house from the backdoor to avoid suspicion. Motilal undertook to secure and provide financial aid to the household on his return. He had also received instructions from Sri Aurobindo to organise a *devasangha*, a spiritual community participating in all the fields of life but from a spiritual basis and a spiritual objective. Motilal's project of Prabartaka Sangha was a concrete result of this guidance and lead received by him from Sri Aurobindo. This association between Sri Aurobindo and Motilal Roy, however, did not proceed beyond 1920, for things with Motilal took a different turn and Sri Aurobindo was obliged to withdraw from the Chandernagore experiment.

The household set up continued to be the same, with the inmates doing the cooking by turns. The economic condition was stringent, with one bath towel serving for everybody including Sri Aurobindo who had his bath last and used the same towel as others had. He gave lessons to Nolini and Moni in Latin, Greek, and French. Sri Aurobindo seems to have had an intention of returning to the scene of political work once he obtained the desired base in Sadhana. In the mean-time, the first world war broke out. Meanwhile, efforts of the British Police to capture Sri Aurobindo continued. They had succeeded in getting Nand Gopal, a leading politician and stevedore of Pondicherry, to participate in plot to

kidnap Sri Aurobindo with the help of *bandes* (local goondas) and take him to British territory where some fabricated charges could be foisted and he arrested. But, as it always happened in similar cases concerning him, this information reached Sri Aurobindo. The young men around him armed themselves with acid bottles in order to resist and prevent forcible entrance into the house. None turned up, however, on the expected night. It was learnt subsequently that Nand Gopal, who headed the plot was about to be arrested on a political charge on a warrant issued by his opponents in power and he escaped to Madras to avoid being arrested.

There was another attempt, less crude, more ingenious. Pondicherry had become a refuge for many prominent political and revolutionary leaders like Subramania Bharati, V.V.S. Iyer, Vs Ra and others. Some time in July 1912 a few secret service men from British India managed to throw a tin containing seditious writings into the well of V.V.S. Iyer's house. Mayuresan, a French Indian, was employed to complain against these 'Swadeshis' as they were called, for their alleged dangerous activities, proof of which would surely be found on search of their dwellings. But there was again a providential intervention. The maidservant in V.V.S. Iyer's house, while drawing water from the well, drew out the tin in the pail. Bharati informed Sri Aurobindo who told him to inform the French Police immediately and ask them to come and examine the contents of the tin. The French authorities appeared on the scene and opened the tin. It was found to contain seditious pamphlets, journals, papers with the image of Kali and writing in Bengali. The idea was evidently to create suspicion of some conspiracy of a revolutionary nature with foreign connections.

The party of investigation that visited Sri Aurobindo's house consisted of the magistrate M. Nandot, the Chief of Police and the public prosecutor. The magistrate found everywhere books, books, trunkfuls of books. He opened the drawers of the table, only to find books and papers. On some of the papers there was writing in Greek. Seeing those books in Latin, in Greek, he was surprised and enquired if Sri Aurobindo knew Greek. On coming to know that he knew Latin, Greek and other European languages, his face changed. He exclaimed, "*Il sait du latin, il sait du grec.*" (He knows Latin, he know Greek !) and invited Sri Aurobindo to meet him in his chambers. And Sri Aurobindo obliged.

It may be added that Mayuresan, threatened with the charge of making a false complaint, fled from Pondicherry to British India.

The financial state of the household is well portrayed in Sri Aurobindo's letter to Motilal Roy, dated July 3, 1912:

Dear M.

Your money (by letter and wire) and clothes reached safely. The French Post Office here has got into the habit (not yet explained) of not delivering your letters till Friday. That was the reason why we wired to you thinking you had not sent the money that week. I do not know whether this means anything,—formerly we used to get your letters on Tuesday, afterwards it came to Wednesday, then Thursday and finally Friday. It may be a natural evolution of French Republicanism. Or it may be something else. I see no signs of the seals having been tampered with, but that is not an absolutely sure indication of security. The postman may be paid by the police. Personally, however, I am inclined to believe in the Republican administration theory,—the Republic always likes to have time on its hands. Still, if you like, you can send Important communications to any other address here you may know of, for the present (of course, by French post and a Madrasi address). All others should come by the old address,—you may be sure, I think, no letter will be actually intercepted, on this side. By the way, please let us know whether Mr Banomali Pal received a letter by French post from Achari enclosing another to Parthasarathi.

I have not written all this time because I was not allowed to put pen to paper for some time,—that is all. I send enclosed letter to our Marathi friend. If he can give you anything for me, please send it without the least delay. If not, I must ask you to procure for me by will power or any other power in heaven or on earth Rs. 50 at least as a loan. If you cannot get it elsewhere, why not apply to Barid Babu? Also, if Nagen is in Calcutta ask him whether the Noakhali gentleman can let me have anything. I was told he had Rs. 300 put aside for me, if I wanted it; but I did not wish to apply to him except in case of necessity. The situation just now is that we have Rs. 1½ or so in hand. Srinivasa is also without Money. As to Bharati living on nothing means an uncertain quantity. The only other man in Pondicherry whom I could at present ask for help is absent *sine die* and my messenger to the South not returned. The last time he came, he brought a promise of Rs. 1000 in a month and some

permanent provision afterwards, but the promise like certain predecessors has not yet been fulfilled and we sent him for cash. But though he should have been here three days ago, he has not returned, and even when he returns, I am not quite sure about the cash and still less sure about the sufficiency of the amount. No doubt, God will provide, but He has contracted a bad habit of waiting till the last moment. I only hope He does not wish us to learn how to live on a minus quantity like Bharati.

Other difficulties are disappearing. The case brought against the Swadeshis has collapsed into the nether regions and the complainant and his son have fled from Pondicherry and become, like ourselves "political refugees" in Cuddalore. I hear he has been sentenced by default to five years imprisonment on false accusation, but I don't know yet whether the report is true. The police were to have left at the end...but a young lunatic (one of Bharati's old disciples in patriotism and atheism) got involved in a sedition-search (for the Indian Sociologist of all rubbish in the world!) and came running here in the nick of time for the police to claim another two months holiday in Pondicherry. However, I think their fangs have been drawn. I may possibly send you the facts of the case for publication in the *Nayak* or any other paper, but I am not yet certain.

I shall write to you about Sadhana etc. another time.

Kali⁵

Silent Yoga

ALL THE WHILE Sri Aurobindo was pursuing his own exploration of the spiritual horizons that were opening before him. He was not following any of the traditional lines of Yoga; he had entrusted himself to his inner Guide and he implicitly followed the direction from within even when, as he says, it did not seem right.

To trace his spiritual Odyssey—while in England, he awoke to the truth of the Self which he felt was the one thing in life worth realising; on landing in Bombay in India, the Calm and Peace of the Self descended upon him; with Lele's help and instructions in Baroda, the realisation of the silent mind and Nirvana came to him with surprising rapidity and established him in the impersonality of the Static Brahman; in Alipore he had the concrete realisation of the Dynamic Brahman as the Universal Godhead; this was followed by his advancing to the factual experience of the Purushottama, the Supreme Divine of whom the dynamic and the static are two complementary aspects; following the specific instructions of Swami Vivekananda in jail, he got to know of the several planes of Existence leading to the Vijnana, the Super-Mind; his austerities in Chandernagore continued in this line of opening up higher and higher levels of Consciousness with their characteristic Powers and personalities. Complete withdrawal from the scene of the hectic political activity and retirement in the comparative solitude of Pondicherry made it possible for him to intensify his tapasya, one-pointed askesis, and sail the uncharted seas of the Spirit. His studies in the Veda—under interesting circumstances that will be described later—confirmed the validity of his experiences and gave him clues for the identification of certain Deities that he had encountered in his meditations earlier. He calls this period of his sadhana—for full four years, 1910-1914—*his silent yoga*. It was to burst into *an afflatus* of Knowledge shortly thereafter through the pages of the *Arya*.

A letter of his during this period (of 12-7-1911) gives an indication of the developments: "I need some place of refuge in which I can complete my Yoga unassailed and build up other souls around me. It seems to me that Pondicherry is the place appointed by those who are Beyond, but you know how much effort is needed to establish the thing that is purposed upon the material plane....."

"I am developing the necessary powers for bringing down the spiritual on the material plane, and I am now able to put myself into men and change them, removing the darkness and bringing light, giving them a new heart and a new mind. This I can do with great swiftness and completeness with those who are near me, but I have also succeeded with men hundreds of miles away. I have also been given the power to read men's characters and hearts, even their thoughts, but this power is not yet absolutely complete, not can I use it always and in all cases. The power of guiding action by the mere exercise of will is also developing, but it is not so powerful as yet as the other. My communication with the other world is yet of a troubled character, though I am certainly in communication with some very great powers. But of all these things I will write more when the final obstacles in my way are cleared from the path.

"What I perceive most clearly, is that the principal object of my Yoga is to remove absolutely and entirely every possible source of error and ineffectiveness, of error in order that the Truth I shall eventually show to men may be perfect, and of ineffectiveness in order that the work of changing the world, so far as I have to assist it, may be entirely victorious and irresistible. It is for this reason that I have been going through so long a discipline and that the more brilliant and mighty results of Yoga have been so long withheld. I have been kept busy laying down the foundation, a work severe and painful. It is only now that the edifice is beginning to rise upon the sure and perfect foundation that has been laid."⁶

He rarely moved out of his residence. It is said he would pace within the house for two to three hours every day—a habit he kept up all his life. He once observed that walking was his favourite *asana*. He used to receive friends in the evening. Śubramania Bharati, Srinivasachari were his regular visitors. On certain days he would take up the hymns of the Rig Veda and explain them. Bharati was an enthusiastic student

and these sessions inspired him to write and sing in his own mother-tongue, Tamil, the glories of the Veda. Nolini Kanta Gupta, one of those who participated in these sittings, describes: "Sri Aurobindo came and took his seat at the table and we sat around. Subramania Bharati, the Tamil poet, and myself were the two who showed the keenest interest. Sri Aurobindo would take up a hymn from the Rig Veda, read it aloud once, explain the meaning of every line and phrase and finally give a full translation. I used to take notes. There were many words in the Rig Veda whose derivation is doubtful and open to difference of opinion. In such cases, Sri Aurobindo used to say that the particular meaning he gave was only provisional and that the matter could be finally decided only after considering it in all the contexts in which the word occurred. His own method of interpreting the Rig Veda was this: on reading the text he found its true meaning by direct intuitive vision through an inner concentration in the first instance, and then he would give it an external verification in the light of reason, making the necessary changes accordingly."⁷

Two Shaved Heads Instead of One

DUE TO ECONOMIC stringency, the house in St. Louis Street had to be given up. A cheaper one in Mission Street was hired (at Rs. 15/- p.m.) in April 1913. Sri Aurobindo received Rs. 1000/- from C. R. Das for his translation into English verse of Das's *Sagar Sangeetin* Bengali.

In October 1913, the household shifted to No. 41 Rue Francois Martin, a spacious, well lighted and ventilated house, where Sri Aurobindo stayed till 1922. This was later known as the Guest House.

Nagen Nag (a cousin of Bijoy Kumar Nag) had arrived in Pondicherry on health reasons and for spiritual help in July 1913. He was accompanied by his servant cum cook Birendranath Roy. One day towards the end of the year, Biren had shaved his head completely. Moni got into the mood and did likewise despite Biren's efforts to dissuade him. This led to a piquant situation. For it turned out that Biren was an agent of the Government of Bengal and he had shaved his head for identification by his substitute who was to replace him. Biren felt that he was found out since Moni by shaving his own head had upset the plans. He confessed, asked for repentance and handed over his monies to Sri Aurobindo and left.

Then the British went on to pressurise the French to hand over the political refugees. The exiles were sounded on the feasibility of finding room in an alternate place like Algeria. When the Nationalists asked Sri Aurobindo as to what he would do under such contingency, he emphatically stated that he was "not going to budge an inch from Pondicherry." Mention must be made of an effort by the British to prevail upon the French to enforce the Alien's Act, by which non-French

residents had to produce "Good Conduct" certificate from high Government officials like Magistrates in British India, for purpose of registration to stay for longer periods in French India. Failing this, the person concerned was to produce a letter signed by five eminent citizens in support. Five such noble men did the needful enabling Sri Aurobindo and others to steer clear of this difficulty.

Finally, the British attempted to get the Foreign Office in Paris to agree to extradite Sri Aurobindo. But Sri Aurobindo's high connections saw to it that the move was scotched.

The Arya

THE 29TH MARCH, 1914 was an important milestone in the life of Sri Aurobindo. For it was on this day that he received an extraordinary person whom he was later to instal as the MOTHER of his spiritual tradition, parampara. It was Mirra, wife of Paul Richard who had met Sri Aurobindo earlier in 1910 and sought interpretation of a mystic symbol. It will be recalled that the symbol had figured in the occult visions of Mirra. That meeting had paved the way for the present meeting with both the Richards. Ostensibly Paul had come for trying to get elected as a representative of French India in the French Parliament; but Mirra's purpose was different. She had got enough signs that Sri Aurobindo was the person with whom her own spiritual mission was linked and she came to meet him. She explains in her answer to a question by Motilal Roy in 1920: "When and how did I become conscious of a mission, which I was to fulfil on earth? And when and how did I meet A.G.?"

"For the knowledge of the mission, it is difficult to say when it came to me. It is as though I was born with it, and following the growth of the mind and brain, the precision and completeness of this consciousness grew also.

"Between 11 and 13 a series of psychic and spiritual experiences revealed to me not only the existence of God but man's possibility of meeting with Him, or realising Him integrally in consciousness and action, of manifesting Him upon earth in a life divine. This, along with a practical discipline for its fulfilment, was given to me during my body's sleep by several teachers, some of whom I met afterwards on the physical plane. Later on, as the interior and exterior development proceeded, the spiritual and psychic relation with one of these beings became more and more and clear and frequent and although I knew little of the Indian philosophies and religions at that time, I was led to call him

Krishna and thenceforth I was aware that it was with him (whom I knew I should meet on earth one day) that the divine work was to be done.

“In the year 1910, my husband came alone to Pondicherry where under very interesting and peculiar circumstances, he met A. G. Since then we both strongly wished to return to India, the country which I had always cherished as my true mother-country and in 1914 this joy was granted to us. As soon as I saw A.G. I recognised him as the well-known being whom I used to call Krishna and this is enough to explain why I am fully convinced that my place and work are near him, in India.”

The meeting on the 29th March, 1914 became a solemn occasion for both Sri Aurobindo and Mirra to recognise their deep identity of way and purpose. Her diary leaf of the next morning (30 March 1914) reads: “Little by little the horizon becomes precise, the path becomes clear. And we advance to an ever greater certitude.

“It matters not if there are hundreds of beings plunged in the densest ignorance. He whom we saw yesterday is on earth: His presence is enough to prove that a day will come when darkness shall be transformed into light, when Thy reign shall be indeed established upon earth.

“O Lord, Divine Builder of this marvel, my heart overflows with joy and gratitude when I think of it, and my hope has no bounds.”

Before she met Sri Aurobindo, Mirra had several ideas of a total regeneration of humanity, with her own background of spiritual and cultural work in Europe. But when she sat near Sri Aurobindo, at his feet, the mind was emptied of its contents and there was a complete blank. Sri Aurobindo observed later that he had not seen before such a self-surrender as hers.

Mirra was already leading a group of seekers in Paris known as *Le Cosmique* (Cosmic) to think and live in terms of a new Consciousness embracing the whole of the human race and manifesting the One Truth of the Divine Reality on earth. She started a similar group, a Society, *L'Idée Nouvelle* (The New Idea) in French India with headquarters in Pondicherry. The functioning and the purpose were explained: “...grouping together of young men of different castes and religions in a

common ideal. All sectarian and political questions are necessarily foreign to its idea and its activities. It is on a higher plane of thought superior to external differences of race, caste, creed and opinion and in the solidarity of the Spirit that unity can be realised.

“*L'Idée Nouvelle* has two rules only for its members, first to devote some time every day to meditation and self-culture, the second, to use or create daily at least one opportunity of being helpful to others. This is, naturally, only the minimum of initial self-training necessary for those who have yet to cast the whole trend of their thought and feeling into the mould of a higher life and to enlarge the egoistic into a collective consciousness.”

It goes without saying that the group was formed of those who were getting interested in Sri Aurobindo's ideas: some of them were young students from the local Calve College whom Mirra would meet regularly. She started learning Sanskrit and Bengali from Sri Aurobindo. She would visit him daily in the afternoons with a coconut sweet. Paul would join, and later in the evening the associates of Sri Aurobindo. There would be stimulating discussions that would at times last till late hours. The entire company was invited to dinner at the Richards on Sundays.

This happy state of affairs, came to an abrupt stop with the outbreak of the First World War and Paul being called to France to join military service. The Richards left for France on February 22, 1915 after the celebration of Mirra's birthday on the 21st by a group of seekers and friends around.

But in the meanwhile much had happened. The election results went against Richard. However, something more fruitful and more lasting ensued. The Richards proposed to Sri Aurobindo that a new journal be started to present to the world a synthesis of Knowledge and Yoga experience developed by him in terms of modern thought. It was proposed to be edited jointly by Sri Aurobindo, Mirra and Paul Richard. The name chosen for the Philosophical Review was *Arya*; it was to have a French version under the title *Revue de la Grande Synthèse*. Sri Aurobindo accepted the proposal, envisaging it as “the intellectual side of my work for the world”.

The objectives and the plan of the *Arya* were clearly enunciated by Sri Aurobindo: "Its object to feel out for the thought of the future, to help in shaping its foundations and to link it to the best and most vital thought of the past.

"We believe in the constant progression of humanity and we hold that progression is the working out of a Thought in Life which sometimes manifests itself on the surface and sometimes sinks below and works behind the mask of external forces and interests.

"The problem of thought therefore is to find out the right idea and the right way of harmony; to restate the ancient and eternal spiritual truth of the Self so that it shall re-embrance, permeate and dominate the mental and physical life; to develop the most profound and vital methods of psychological self-discipline and self-development so that the mental and psychical life of man may express the spiritual life through the utmost possible expansion of its own richness, power and complexity; and to seek for the means and motives by which his external life, his society and his institutions may remould themselves progressively in the truth of the spirit and develop towards the utmost possible harmony of individual freedom and social unity. This is our ideal and our search in the 'Arya'.

"Unity for the human race by an inner oneness and not only by an external association of interests; the resurgence of man out of the merely intellectual and aesthetic into the glories of the spiritual existence; the pouring of the power of the Spirit into the physical mould and mental instrument so that man may develop his manhood into that supermanhood which shall exceed our present state as much as this exceeds the animal state from which science tells us that we have issued. These three are one; for man's unity and man's self-transcendence can come only by living in the Spirit."

The first issue came out on August 15, 1914, Sri Aurobindo's birthday, both in its English and French editions. In February 1915, the outbreak of the World War obliged the Richards to return to France and hence the French edition had to be dis-continued after seven issues. Sri Aurobindo had to carry on alone, writing all the 64 pages each month, the features contributed by the Richards viz. *Eternal Wisdom. The Wherefore of the Worlds*, having ceased. Sri Aurobindo comments in a

letter to Dilip Kumar Roy: “And philosophy! Let me tell you in confidence that I never, never, never, was a philosopher—although I have written philosophy which is another story altogether. I knew precious little about philosophy before I did the Yoga and came to Pondicherry—I was a poet and a politician, not a philosopher. How I managed to do it and why? First, because Richard proposed to me to cooperate in a philosophical review—and as my theory was that a Yogi ought to be able to turn his hand to anything, I could not very well refuse; and then he had to go to the war and left me in the lurch with sixty-four pages a month of philosophy all to write by my lonely self. Secondly, because I had only to write down in the terms of the intellect all that I had observed and come to know in practising Yoga daily and the philosophy was there automatically. But that is not being a philosopher!”⁸

He notes elsewhere: “I made in fact no study of metaphysics in my school and college days. What little I knew about philosophy, I picked up desultorily in my general reading. I once read not Hegel, but a source book on Hegel; it left no impression on me. Later on in India I read a book on Bergson, but that too ran off like water from a duck’s back. I remembered very little of what I had read and absorbed nothing. German metaphysics and most European philosophy since the Greeks, seemed to me a mass of abstractions with nothing concrete or real that could be firmly grasped and written in a metaphysical jargon to which I had not the key. I tried once a translation of Kant but dropped it after the first two pages and never tried again. In India at Baroda I read a ‘Tractate’ of Schopenhauer on the six centres and that seemed to me more interesting. In sum, my interest in metaphysics was almost null, and in general philosophy sporadic. I did not read Berkely and only (dipped) into Hume; Locke left me very cold. The general ideas only remained with me.

“As to Indian Philosophy, it was a little better, but not much. I made no study of it, but knew the general ideas of the Vedanta philosophies, I knew practically nothing of the other except what I had read in Max Mueller and in other general accounts. The basic idea of the Self caught me when I was in England, I tried to realise what the Self might be. The first Indian writings that took hold of me were the Upanishads and these roused in me a strong enthusiasm and I tried later to translate some of them. The other strong intellectual influences in India in early life were the sayings of Ramakrishna and the writhings

and speeches of Vivekananda, but this was a first introduction to Indian spiritual experience and not as philosophy. They did not however carry me to the practice of Yoga; their influence was purely mental.”⁹

In a conversation (on August 26, 1940) he notes: “The only two books that have influenced me are the Gita and the Upanishads. What I wrote was the work of intuition and inspiration working on the basis of my spiritual experience. I have no other technique like the modern philosopher whose philosophy I consider only intellectual and therefore of secondary value. Experience and formulation of experience I consider to be the true aim of philosophy. The rest is merely intellectual work and may be, interesting but nothing more.”¹⁰

Eye-witnesses describe how Sri Aurobindo would type parallel sequences on most difficult subjects straight to the press, correct the proofs himself and see to the despatch of the issues regularly every month. The printers were the Modern Press, Pondicherry.

The *Arya* created a profound impression on the mind of the readers. Annie Besant, leader of the Theosophical Movement, is said to have observed that she had seen such an afflatus in only one other—Mme. Blavatsky. Dwijendranath Tagore, elder brother of the Poet, used to say that not since the days of the Vedic hymns was such God-knowledge given to humanity.

Most of the major writings of Sri Aurobindo came to be serialised in the *Arya*. There was an underlying plan. Sri Aurobindo explains:

“Our idea was the thinking out of a synthetic philosophy which might be a contribution to the thought of the new age that is coming upon us. We start from the idea that humanity is moving to a great change of its life which will even lead to a new life of the race, in all countries where men think, there is now in various forms that idea and that hope, and our aim has been to search for the spiritual, religious and other truth which can enlighten and guide the race in this movement and endeavour. The spiritual experience and the general truths on which such an attempt could be based, were already present to us, otherwise we should have had no right to make the endeavour at all. This truth had to be worked out first of all from the metaphysical point of view; for in philosophy, metaphysical truth is the nucleus of the rest...therefore we gave the first place to *The Life Divine*. It was necessary to show that

these truths were not inconsistent with the old Vedantic truth, therefore we included explanations from this point of view of the Veda, two of the *Upanishads* and Gita. But the Veda has been obscured by the ritualists and the scholiasts. Therefore we showed in a series of articles—(The Secret of the Veda, Selected Hymns etc.)—initially only as yet, the way of writing of the Vedic mystics, their system of symbols and the truths they figure. Among the *Upanishads*, we took the Isa and the Kena; the Gita we are treating as a powerful application of the truth of the spirit to the largest and most difficult part of the truth of life, to action, and a way by which action can lead us to birth into the Spirit and can be harmonised with the spiritual life. Truth of philosophy is of a merely theoretical value unless it can be lived, and we have, therefore, tried in *The Synthesis of Yoga* to arrive at a synthetical view of the principles and methods of the various lines of spiritual discipline and the way in which they can lead to an integral divine life in the human existence. But this is an individual development, and therefore, it was necessary to show too how our ideal can work out in the social life of mankind. In *The Psychology of Social Development* (The Human Cycle), we have indicated how these truths affect the evolution of human society. In *The Ideal of Human Unity*, we have taken the present trend of mankind towards a closer unification and tried to appreciate its tendencies and show what is wanting to them in order that real human unity may be achieved.”¹¹

Other sequence include the *Defence of Indian Culture*, *The Future Poetry*, besides writings on themes like *Evolution*, *Karma*, *War and Self-Determination* etc.

Sri Aurobindo stopped the Journal in January 1921, after seven years and six months, not because it was not an economical proposition, it was more than paying its way, but because the human mind was not ready for further Knowledge. Besides he seems to have felt that he had put himself out too much.

This corpus of Knowledge, however, was not a product of his brain-brilliant though it was. The whole of the *Arya*, he recalls, was transmitted directly into his pen.

The Arya Sequences

The Life Divine

SPEAKING OF HIS magnum opus, *The Life Divine*, Sri Aurobindo makes it clear that it is not a system of philosophy argued and formulated by the logical mind but his own experience presented in terms of the intellect. When he was once asked why, when he did not lay much store by words in the realm of spiritual experience, he wrote the bulky volume of *The Life Divine*, he replied that he had to convince the modern mind and the modern mind is a rational mind necessitating a rational presentation. He does not follow the tradition of the Acharyas, stating the opponent's position first, refuting it and then proceeding to present one's own. He is content to state his approach, taking note of other approaches only to the extent it is necessary. There are no polemics in his writings.

The Life Divine occupied the premier place in the pages of the Arya and it ran into fifty-four chapters (August 1914-January 1919). It was nearly twenty years later that Sri Aurobindo took it up for revision. He had been obliged from November 24, 1938 by a fracture in the leg, to suspend his usual activities and at the Mother's suggestion, he started revising his earlier writings for publication in book form for which there was an insistent demand. *The Life Divine* was the first major work that he took up for revision. The first volume bore comparatively few revisions, though he added a new chapter on the *Supermind, Mind and the Overmind Maya* at the end. He gave a sub-title to the volume: *Omnipresent Reality and the Universe*. And it appeared in November 1939. The second volume, however, was subjected to thorough revision; many of the chapters were recast and enlarged and twelve chapters written anew. It is one of his most thoroughly revised works. It appeared in July 1940 with the sub-title: *The knowledge and the Ignorance—the Spiritual Evolution*.

Being the main metaphysic of his system, *The Life Divine* has been widely read and it has been prescribed for study in many of the Universities in India. It is being used in some Universities in other countries also. It has undergone many printing and has been translated into several languages, Indian and foreign.

The philosophy presented in this voluminous work may be described as a realistic Advaita, Integral Realism. For Sri Aurobindo conceives of the Supreme Reality as an Absolute which, when turned to manifestation, reveals itself as Sat-Chit-Ananda, Existence-Consciousness-Bliss. This Reality manifests the Universe out of its own Being. What is manifested is as real as what manifests it. The manifestation is not a sudden jump from the Reality that is Divine, that is to say, perfect. There is a graded devolution, the Consciousness becoming more and more self-limited, less and less subtle, till it culminates in the Inconscience of Matter. At each level of the descent, planes of Consciousness are formed, each with its special character based upon its particular principle. Sri Aurobindo's classification of these planes corresponds to the seven planes of the Vedic system: Sat, Existence; Chit, Consciousness; Ananda, Bliss; Vijnana, Gnosis; Manas, Mind ; Prana, Life; Anna, Matter. This is an ordered universe, a Cosmos, with its several planes and worlds interacting.

If devolution is the course of the descent of the Reality into material form, evolution is the way in which its manifestation takes place gradually. Every form in creation has a divine spark which is developing in consciousness till it becomes the soul in the human and thereafter it enters into a new stage of conscious evolution. Karma, Rebirth and progression are the necessary corollaries of the upward movement from Matter to Life, from Life to Mind, from Mind to the Divine Mind (Supermind) and from there to Sat-Chit-Ananda.

The human today is in the throes of a new birth from the Mind into the Super mind. The mental being is being replaced by the supramental consciousness. When this inevitable step is taken and the Truth-Mind begins to function in the human, a new era of freedom of the spirit, universalisation of consciousness and transformation of life will mark the beginnings of Life Divine. That is the next goal.

Sri Aurobindo discusses all these issues and traces the long course of this evolution, the stages that have marked the ascent of the emerging

consciousness, the part played by Religion, Mysticism, Occultism, Reason, Science, Intuition, the various Theories of Knowledge, the movement from Sevenfold Ignorance to Sevenfold Knowledge, and the direction in which Nature is being precipitated by the pressure of the manifesting Spirit. He concludes:

“If there is an evolution in material Nature and if it is an evolution of being with consciousness and life as its two key terms and powers, this fullness of being, fullness of consciousness, fullness of life must be the goal of development towards which we are tending and which will manifest at an early or later stage of our destiny. The Self, the Spirit, the Reality that is disclosing itself out of the first inconscience of life and matter would evolve its complete truth of being and consciousness in that life and matter. It would return to itself,—or, if its end as an individual is to return into its Absolute, it could make that return also,—not through a frustration of life but through a spiritual completeness of itself in life. Our evolution in the Ignorance with its chequered joy and pain of self-discovery, and world-discovery, its half-fulfilments, its constant finding and missing, is only our first state. It must lead inevitably towards an evolution in the Knowledge, a self-finding and self-unfolding of the Spirit, a self-revelation of the Divinity in things in that true power of itself in Nature which is to us still a Supernature.”¹²

The Synthesis of Yoga

If *The Life Divine* gives the principles of the spiritual evolution that is to bring about the Kingdom of God upon earth, the *Synthesis* lays down the Way to translate these truths into practice. And that Way is Yoga. Yoga, according to Sri Aurobindo, is practical psychology and he takes a birds' eye view of the main lines of Yoga as they have been developed.

After a preliminary survey of the principles of Yoga in general and an examination of the methods of Nature in so far as they provide the proto-type for yoga-processes, he studies the contributions of the three major lines of Yoga, *trimarga*, the Yogas of Works, Knowledge and Devotion, *karma, jnana and bhakti*. He indicates where each of them meets the others in the course of its development. He also expounds, briefly, the principles of the *Hatha* and the *Raja Yogas* and underlines their limitations.

After this he proceeds to work out his own Yoga of Self-Perfection which assimilates the fundamentals of the past yogic effort and extends their range to reach the whole of the human being. Step by step, he takes up each part of the being and draws the lines on which it is to evolve towards perfection in its divine term. Side 'by side, he underlines the need for integration of each advance with the development of others. He examines the different aspects of the Divine Reality viz. the Personal, the Impersonal, the Static, the Dynamic etc. and shows their relevance to the need of the evolving human spirit. He describes the fourfold personality of the Soul and the answering truths in the manifestation of the Divine Shakti. He relates the Upanishadic *koshas* sheaths or 'bodies' of the individual to corresponding planes of consciousness in the cosmos and works out their equation through the development of his Integral Yoga. He builds the ladder of ascent above the highest levels of the thinking mind to still higher levels of the Higher Mind, Illumined Mind, Intuitive Mind, Overmind and Supermind in its various gradations.

He was still developing his yogic insights and sketching out the routes on the dizzying heights of the supramental Time and Space, when the *Arya* ceased publication. He had written on this subject from the first to the last issue, yet the work remained incomplete.

He had hoped to complete it and revise wherever necessary. But that was never done. Only the first part, *The Yoga of Divine Works*, was thoroughly revised and published in book form in 1948. The second part, *The Yoga of Integral Knowledge* was also revised but in portions. The rest was not touched. This body of knowledge on the theory and practice of Yoga in its multiple bearings, immense potentialities and graded application is among the most authentic manuals on the subject. If only the author had completed it to his satisfaction, it would have been a veritable Veda of Yoga.

The entire work was published for the first time in book form in 1955—the revised and the unrevised portions together—and it constitutes the most comprehensive work of Sri Aurobindo on Yoga. *His Letters on Yoga* (3 volumes) compiled from his letters to disciples and correspondents in reply to their queries relating to the practice of Yoga, form a happy complement to the *Synthesis*. These three volumes, however, are by no means complete; there are still many letters that are being collected and edited.

The Psychology of Social Development

Man, the individual evolves in his consciousness towards the Spirit; he moves from his crude, primitive beginnings to more and more refined, broader dimensions of life. What of the society of which he is a member? Sri Aurobindo examines the growth of societies and sees how far the truth of evolution of consciousness applies to the collectivity. The series in the *Arya* (August 1916–July 1918) under the title, *The psychology of Social Development*, throws a fresh light on the factors that motivate the development of human societies.

Looking at the early societies all over the world, Sri Aurobindo points out how these men were aware of elements and powers in Nature that exercised a profound influence on their daily lives. They felt and sensed some presence in the environment and they looked up to them with awe, worshipped them and developed relations with them through their own rituals and prayers. This is the *Symbolic Age* in which everything in external life is looked upon as a symbol for deeper and unseen but concretely felt-truths and powers. A religious and intuitive mentality characterises these societies.

Gradually, the external forms tend to become more important than their motivating truths, leading to the *Conventional and Typal Age*. Since things become more and more artificial, the tyranny of social law and custom try to stifle the individual spirit. This leads to the revolt of the individual in Age of Individualism and Reason to assert his freedom to function and grow as he chooses. The unchecked career of the individual at the cost of society leads to search for key to human progress and in the Age of Subjectivism, there is a shift from surface probings of reason to deeper questionings. Having passed these stages, we are on the verge of a *Spiritual Age*. The problem of man is being seen in a different perspective and the higher human mind is coming to recognise that it is only at the level of the soul, the Self, that all disharmonies can be resolved, conflicts eliminated and Peace and Unity achieved. Sri Aurobindo writes: “Therefore the individuals who will most help the future of humanity in the new age will be those who will recognise a spiritual evolution as the destiny and therefore the great need of the human being. Even as the animal man has been largely converted into a mentalised and at the top a highly mentalised humanity, so too now or in the future an evolution or conversion—it does not greatly matter

which figure we use or what theory we adopt to support it—of the present type of humanity into a spiritualised humanity is the need of the race and surely the intention of Nature; that evolution or conversion will be their ideal and endeavour. They will be comparatively indifferent to particular belief and form and leave men to resort to the beliefs and forms to which they are naturally drawn. They will only hold as essential the faith in this spiritual conversion, the attempt to live it out and whatever knowledge—the form of opinion into which it is thrown does not so much matter—can be converted into this living. They will especially not make the mistake of thinking that this change can be effected by machinery and outward institutions; they will know and never forget that it has to be lived out by each man inwardly or it can never be made a reality for the kind. They will adopt in its heart of meaning the inward view of the East which bids man seek the secret of his destiny and salvation within; but also they will accept, though with a different turn given to it, the importance which the West rightly attaches to life and to the making the best we know and can attain the general rule of all life. They will not make society a shadowy background to a few luminous figures or a rigidly fenced and earth-bound root for the growth of a comparatively rare and sterile flower of ascetic spirituality. They will not accept the theory that the many must necessarily remain forever on the lower ranges of life and only a few climb into the free air and the light, but will start from the standpoint of the great spirits who have striven to regenerate the life of the earth and held that faith in spite of all previous failures. Failures must be originally numerous in everything great and difficult, but the time comes when the experience of past failures can be profitably used and the gate that so long resisted opens.”¹³

The Ideal of Human Unity

How far does this truth of evolution of Consciousness from division to unity, fraction to harmony, apply to the political development of humanity? Sri Aurobindo studies this question in his series on *The Ideal of Human Unity* in the *Arya* (Sept. 1915–July 1918). He commences with the early beginnings of human aggregates in the form of families, clans, tribes and so on and traces a gradual formation of groups with identity of interests. He draws attention to the emergence of a group spirit which gives an individuality to the people who so associate themselves together. These groups, in turn, coalesce under pressure of circumstances—no doubt under the design of Nature—into larger groups

which become sub-nation units, each with its own provincial character. Each of these peoples develops its soul-formation and as these sub-nation units get united under compulsions of political, military or cultural needs, we have the nation soul. Each individualised nation has its own national soul articulated in its distinct language, religion, traditions and ideals. Nature has been trying for larger aggregations than the nation-unit. The concept of empires having failed, there is the emergence of the concept of Commonwealth and regional groupings for common benefit. Nature is bound to proceed further in the direction of world unity.

Sri Aurobindo observes that "The ultimate result must be the formation of a World-State and the most desirable form of it would be a federation of free nationalities in which all subjection or forced inequality and subordination of one to another would have disappeared and, though some might preserve a greater natural influence, all would have an equal status. A confederacy would give the greatest freedom to the nations constituting the World-State, but this might give too much room for fissiparous or centrifugal tendencies to operate; a federal order would then be the most desirable. All else would be determined by the course of events and by general agreement or the shape given by the ideas and necessities that may grow up in the future. A world-union of this kind would have the greatest chances of long survival or permanent existence.

"The ideal of human unity would be no longer an unfulfilled ideal but an accomplished fact and its preservation given into the hands of the united human peoples. Its future destiny would lie on the knees of the gods and, if the gods have a use for the continued existence of the race, may be left to lie there safe."²⁴

Scriptures

The Veda

SRI AUROBINDO DOES not go to the scriptures to find support for his philosophy nor does he interpret them from his own standpoint. His studies are to see if there is corroboration in them of the eventful spiritual realisation that came crowding upon him and the Knowledge that emerged on the basis of his experience.

His entry into the Veda, however, took place under peculiar circumstances. He explains how he had accepted, like other educated Indians of his day, the reading of oriental scholars that the northern Aryans had invaded the southern Dravidians, and that the Vedic hymns bear ample testimony to this historical struggle between the white settlers and dark indigenous people. Early in his stay in Southern India, he had doubts on the matter when he began to see 'Aryan' faces among the southerners and recalled southern features in the northern physiognomy. The scholar in him wanted to look into the hymns for what evidence he could find in them for or against the popularly accepted theories. His 'fortunate ignorance of Sayana' helped him to go direct to the contents of the hymnal and what he discovered was amazing. Not only was there no evidence of the invasion of one race by another but there was enough proof of the psychological character of the hymns, the race-types themselves referring not to physical variations but to psychological distinctions. He found emerging before his mind's eye a whole body of spiritual experience recorded in a language that is more suggestive than expressive. He also found passages shedding vivid light on some of his own inner experiences that had remained obscure before. This led him to further studies—all by himself, without the aid of commentaries—and he came to definite conclusions which he presented in a series of articles in the *Arya* under the general heading, *The Secret of the Veda* and in a parallel series of annotated translations of *Select Hymns*.

In these remarkable studies of the Hymns of the Rig Veda, he finds ample support for the ancient tradition of Yaska that the Veda has a threefold meaning, ritualistic, cosmological and spiritual. Sri Aurobindo does not deny the various interpretations that have been offered but maintains that the spiritual is central to all. He analyses the Vedic Religion and Mysticism in its several components: the institution of Sacrifice, the Deities to whom the offerings were made, the significance of the oblations and the fruits of the Sacrifice, the order in which the Sacrifice proceeds and the several meanings suggested by certain key-expressions occurring frequently in the hymns. He makes an in-depth study which testifies to the psychological and spiritual character of the Vedic utterance that has relevance to the spiritual seeker even today after millenniums. His writing on these were published in 1946, under the title *Hymns to the Mystic Fire*.

His disciple, the well-known Sanskrit scholar, Sri T. V. Kapali Sastry, however, has written a detailed commentary on the First Ashtaka of the Rig Veda, using the clues provided by Sri Aurobindo. This work, *Siddhanjana*, done in the traditional Sastraic lines, was published in 1950-51 and is being translated into English.

The Upanishads

Sri Aurobindo regards the Upanishads as enlarging continuations of the Vedic heritage. The Rishis of the Upanishads take up the truth envisioned by the earlier Seers and seek to verify them in their own experience. Not reason but intuition is their guide. He does not agree with many of the modern scholars who treat the Upanishads as revolts against the Veda; he holds that they restate the wisdom of the Veda in a language more suitable to a later mentality.

His translations of the *Kena* and the *Isha* Upanishads had already appeared in the *Karmayogin*. Both the renderings were revised and given along with his commentary in the *Arya*. It is of interest to note that he has written several commentaries from different standpoints on the text of the *Isha* and one of them is entitled 'The Life Divine'. In fact it is the affirmative vision of the *Isha* that has provided the ground work for the massive edifice of his philosophy—comprehensive and the progressive—expressed in the work *The Life Divine*. He shows how the *Isha* reconciles the many conflicting standpoints that perplex the rational mind viewing the problem of creation. The *kena* is masterly in its analysis

and his commentary explicates the many subtle verities that are implicit in its cryptic verses.

The *Mundaka* Upanishad had appeared in his translation in the pages of the *Karmayogin*. It was revised and published in the *Arya*. Another writing in the *Arya* on the Upanishads is his Readings from the *Taittiriya*. This Upanishad is perhaps the most supportive of his Yoga and these Readings underline this feature.

Sri Aurobindo had translated a number of Upanishads and written some essays on the Thought in the Upanishads etc. during his Baroda days. They include the Katha, Mandukya, Taittiriya, Aitareya, Prashna Upanishads. All the translations were subsequently published in one volume, *Eight Upanishads*, in 1953.

The Gita

Mention had already been made of Sri Aurobindo's translation of the first six chapters of the Bhagavad Gita when he was at Baroda. He took the Gita as his companion in the Jail at Alipore and followed its directions in his yoga-practice. Later he wrote his interpretative *Essays on the Gita* (in two series) in the *Arya* (August 1916-July 1920). The First Series (revised) was published in book form in 1922, the Second (revised) in 1928 and both together in one volume in 1950. This book has run into several editions since then. It is perhaps his most widely read work.

He observes at the outset that every scripture has a temporal and local element and a content that is of perennial relevance. We should seek from our study of the Gita not its metaphysical connotation in its own setting but what living truths it can offer for our needs today. And he explains in the light of modern thought what is misunderstood or conveniently interpreted e.g. the doctrine of *nishkama karma*, develops the philosophy of Avatarhood in the background of the evolution of humanity, indicates the lines on which Jnana, Bhakti and Karma, (Knowledge, Devotion and Action) combine to build dynamic spiritual consciousness, examines the implications of the three Gunas, Sattva, Rajas and Tamas, in their all-prevasive action, and handles many other problems that arise with a firm, authentic grasp of the fundamentals. He observes: "The thought of the Gita is not pure Monism although it sees in one unchanging, pure, eternal Self the foundation of all cosmic

existence, nor Mayawada although it speaks of the Maya of the three modes of Prakriti omni-present in the created world; nor is it qualified Monism although it places in the One his eternal supreme. Prakriti manifested in the form of the Jiva and lays most stress on dwelling in God rather than dissolution as the supreme state of spiritual consciousness; not is it Sankhya although it explains the created world by the double principle of *Purusha* and *Prakriti*; nor is it Vaishnava Theism although it presents to us Krishna, who is the *Avatar* of *Vishnu* according to the *Puranas*, as the supreme Deity and allows no essential difference not an actual superiority of the status of the indefinable relationless Brahman over that of this Lord of beings who is the Master of universe and the Friend of all creatures...The Gita is not a weapon for dialectical warfare; it is a gate opening on the whole world of spiritual truth and experience and the view it gives us embraces all the provinces of that supreme region. It maps out, but it does not cut up or build walls or hedges to confine our vision.”

The Tantras

Though Sri Aurobindo does not expressly write on the Tantra as a subject, there is much that he says in his side remarks and observations in his extensive writings that indicates the high esteem in which he held the thought and the vision of the Tantras. He looks upon the Tantric system as a high water-mark of the national movement for synthesis of the various values that have come to be developed in the long history of Indian people. The Tantra seeks to bridge the gulf between Nature and Soul, Matter and Spirit, Man and God, the Individual and the Cosmos. Man is the centre of this synthesis. The correspondence between the organisation of the individual being and that of the Cosmos, the microcosm and the macrocosm, is nowhere utilised for developing the potential of life to its fullest as is done in the Tantra. His own Yoga incorporates the principle of ascent and descent as well as the truth of the Divine Mother in the workings of the universe with which the Tantra has familiarised the Indian mind. In his *Letters on Yoga*, he restates the working truth of the philosophy of *Kundalini* and the *Chakras* with a connotation and in a language that are convincing to the rational intelligence.

Defence of Indian Culture

In an appreciative series of articles in the *Arya* (August 1918–November 1918) on Dr. James Cousins’s book, *Renaissance of India*,

and in another series in answer to a loaded attack on Indian Civilisation and Culture (December 1919–January 1921) by William Archer, Sri Aurobindo examines the fundamentals of Indian Culture, both as a whole and componentwise. After giving a general survey from the early beginnings in the Vedic age up to the present times, he analyses the motifs of the Indian Spirit as reflected in her Religion, Literature, Art, Polity. He compares the long history of Indian civilisation with the comparatively brief careers of civilisations in Europe and elsewhere and analyses the factors that have given an unparalleled continuity to the life of Indian people.

He writes: “Its first period was that of a great spiritual outflowing in which the forms were supple, flexible and freely responsive to its essential spirit. That fluid movement passed away into an age of strong intellectuality in which all was fixed into distinct, sufficiently complex, but largely treated and still supple forms and rhythms. There came as a consequence a period of richly crystallised fixity shaken by crises which were partly met by a change of ideas and a modification of forms. But the hard binding of set forms triumphed at last, there was a decline of the inspiring spirit, a stagnation of living force, a progressive decay of the outward structure. The decay was accompanied and at once arrested for a moment and hastened in the end by the impact of other cultures. Today we are in the midst of a violent and decisive crisis brought about by the inflooding of the West and of all for which it stands. An upheaval resulted that began with the threat of a total death and irretrievable destruction of the culture; but its course is now uplifted on the contrary by the strong hope of a great revival, transmutation and renaissance.”¹⁵

Sri Aurobindo refutes the ill-informed criticism that the Indian mind is prone to fatalism due to too much of otherworldly religion and there is a pronounced lack of vigour of life. He notes: “When we look at the past of India, what strikes us is her stupendous vitality, her inexhaustible power of life and joy of life, her almost unimaginable prolific creativeness. For three thousand years at least,—it is indeed much longer,—she has been creating abundantly and incessantly, lavishly, with an inexhaustible many-sidedness, republics and kingdoms and empires, philosophies and cosmogonies and sciences and creeds and arts and poems and all kinds of monuments, palaces and temples and public works, communities and societies and religious orders, laws and codes and rituals, physical

sciences, psychic sciences, systems of Yoga, systems of politics and administration, arts spiritual, arts worldly, trades, industries, fine crafts,—the list is endless and in each item there is almost a plethora of activity. She creates and creates and is not satisfied and is not tired; she will not have an end of it, seems hardly to need a space for rest.....”

He points out that Indian spirituality is affirmative of life; only it looks at life in a broader setting and invests it with values that are long-ranged and eternal. Not only does it give a Law of life, Dharma, generally but also a law for each type of temperament. It regards a developing evolution in humanity and holds up the truth of a graded idealism. It recognises the right of the individual for freedom of faith and growth but it also supports the claim of the collectivity on its members and reconciles them in the truth of both being terms of one Divine manifestation. Karma, Rebirth, do not enervate the Indian as alleged; they give him fortitude and self-reliance. He moulds his fate. In no other approach is man given so much freedom to think, to function, as in the Indian way of life. The spiritual has been the dominant motif of Indian life and that shall be the key to her future. “India has the key to the knowledge and conscious application of the ideal; what was dark to her before in its application, she can now, with a new light illumine: the fences which she created to protect the outer growth of the spiritual ideal and which afterwards became barriers to its expansion and farther application, she can now break down and give her spirit a freer field and an ampler flight: she can, if she will, give a new and decisive turn to the problems over which all mankind is labouring and stumbling, for the clue to their solutions is there in her ancient knowledge.”

In his analysis of the principles and forms of Indian Polity Sri Aurobindo notes that the Indian system was totally different in spirit from the western. He deplores that “Indian scholars have attempted to read the modern ideas and types of democracy and even a parliamentary system into the past of India”, and calls for an objective study of the political evolution of the Indian society in order to discover the nation’s own genius which combined the social mores, spiritual ideas and individual needs for progress in the development of a form or forms of political governance that have been remarkably resilient and living.

He comes to the question again later in the course of his conversations, when he observes:

“It is the European idea that makes you think that the parliamentary form or constitution is the best. We had great communal liberty and the communities were the centres of power and of national life. The king could not infringe the right of the commune. The king had a continuity of policy from father to son and he could not infringe the rights of the communes; and if these rights were interfered with, the people at once made themselves felt. That was the form which the genius of the race had evolved. You think that this parliamentary government is the best form of government. In fact, that form has been a success *no where except in England*. In France it is worse, in America in spite of their being an Anglo-Saxon race, it has not succeeded...I don't understand why everything should be centralised as in the parliamentary constitution. We must have different, numerous centres of culture and power, full of national life, spread all over the country and they must have political freedom to develop themselves.”¹⁶

Answering a question on the difference between European and Indian politics, he says: “The Indian system grew out of Life. It had room for everything and every interest. There were monarchy, aristocracy, democracy. Every interest was represented in the Government, while the Western system grew out of Mind. In Europe they are led by reason and want to make everything cut-and-dried without any chance of freedom or variation. If it is democracy, then democracy only; and no room for anything else. They can't be plastic.”¹⁷

It is a pity that these studies, now issued under the title, *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, have not received as much attention as they should. There is much that he has said by way of warning and in giving firm direction in the field of religion, social living, literature, arts, polity, that can form the blue-print for a restructuring of the national life. India can prosper only if she pursues the line of her innate genius. What precisely is this priceless heritage of her peoples and how it is to be reshaped and developed in order that the whole world could benefit from it and live and progress in Peace and Brotherhood is a constant theme of this insightful, objective, scholarly study of the key to Indian history and civilisation.

The Future Poetry

What started as a critical review of a remarkable book of Dr. James Cousins, *New Ways in English Literature*, developed into a series of essays—32 in number—that appeared in the *Arya* (from December 1917 to July 1920) under the title. ‘The Future Poetry’. Poetry had always been a subject after his heart and no wonder Sri Aurobindo delves deep in these studies in the theme of Poetry in general—the Essence of Poetry, Rhythm and Movement, Style and Substance, Vision and Utterance—before he goes to discuss the character and course of English Poetry. Chaucer, Shakespeare, Spencer, Marlowe, Milton, Byron, Wordsworth, the Victorian poets—Tennyson, Browning and Arnold—and the more recent poets like Keats, Whitman, Carpenter, Tagore, are discussed in depth. Sri Aurobindo sees in the general trend of poetry a distinct turn towards the Breath of the Spirit and a more insistent *mantric* note in the best examples of poetic expression. He visualises an increasing force of overhead inspiration, intuitive, revelatory, entering into the poetry of tomorrow. Much of the poetry he wrote subsequently, his sonnets and other poems of yogic experience, and more notably his epic, *Savitri* illustrate and exemplify his perceptions and anticipations of the character and content of New Poetry.

Sri Aurobindo revised these essays later on and they have since been brought out as a definitive edition.

Other Sequences

And there were other, smaller, sequences in the pages of the *Arya*. He wrote on the developments during and after the World War (1914-18) including the League of Nations. He drew attention to the emergence of the power of Labour and the resurgence of Asia in the crucible of world-forces. He noted the enormous service rendered by the hosts of Rudra on the battlefields of Europe in clearing the debris of a crashing, out-of-date, old world and in preparing the way for the birth of a new one. He underlined the need for a psychological change on the part of the victorious Powers if the war that ended was indeed to be the war to end war.

Money-Power

FINANCIAL DEFFICULTIES SEEM to have been endemic during all these years.

It had been hoped that the starting of the *Arya* journal (with its French edition) would at least partly meet the needs not only of Sri Aurobindo's household but also of the Richards. But obviously the journal just maintained itself with but little surplus left.

A small business concern 'Aryan Stores' was opened on Rue Dupleix in September 1916 with the capital provided by Mirra Richard and Saurin Bose looked after it. However, it did not seem to have made much headway for it was disposed of in 1919.

Right from his early days in England, Sri Aurobindo never had enough to meet his needs. For the larger part of his student life, he had suffered the privations of poverty without demur.

The attitude that money belongs to God governed his approach throughout his life.

Sri Aurobindo defines his philosophy of money in clear terms:

“Money is the visible sign of a universal force, and this force in its manifestation on earth works on the vital and physical planes and is indispensable to the fullness of the outer life. In its origin and its true action it belongs to the Divine. But like other powers of the Divine it is delegated here and in the ignorance of the lower Nature can be usurped for the uses of the ego or held by Asuric influences and perverted to their purpose. This is indeed one of the three forces—power, wealth, sex—that have the strongest attraction for the human ego and the Asura and are most generally misheld and misused by those who retain them. The seekers or keepers of wealth are more often possessed rather than its possessors; few escape entirely a certain distorting influence stamped

on it by its long seizure and perversion by the Asura. For this reason most spiritual disciplines insist on a complete self-control, detachment and renunciation of all bondage to wealth and of all personal and egoistic desire for its possession. Some even put a ban on money and riches and proclaim poverty and bareness of life as the only spiritual condition. But this is an error; it leaves the power in the hands of the hostile forces. To reconquer it for the Divine to whom it belongs and use it divinely for the divine life is the supramental way for the Sadhaka..."

"All wealth belongs to the Divine and those who hold it are trustees, not possessors. It is with them today, tomorrow it may be elsewhere. All depends on the way they discharge their trust while it is with them, in what spirit, with what consciousness in their use of it, to what purpose..."

"Do not look up to men because of their riches or allow yourself to be impressed by the show, the power or the influence. When you ask for the Mother, you must feel that it is she who is demanding through you a very little of what belongs to her and the man from whom you ask will be judged by his response.

"If you are free from the money-taint but without any ascetic withdrawal, you will have a greater power to command the money for the divine work. Equality of mind, absence of demand and the full dedication of all you possess and receive and all your power of acquisition to the Divine Shakti and her work are the signs of this freedom. Any perturbation of mind with regard to money and its use, any claim, any grudging is a sure index of some imperfection or bondage..."¹⁸

Explaining matters further concerning the use of money, he says during the course of a conversation: "As the money-power today is in hands of the hostile forces, naturally, we have to fight them. Whenever they see that you are trying to oust them they will try to thwart your efforts. You have to bring a higher power than these and put them down."

To sum up: Money is a universal force, impersonal in character, which flows where it is drawn by congenial condition of care, conservation, and right and abundant use. Money-power demands to be largely used, thrown into creative channels, to be kept constantly on the move. It must be cherished and utilised with a consciousness of its

purpose. Reckless spending, waste, disregard of its sanctity, repels the flow of wealth.

Sri Aurobindo explains elsewhere how by neglecting the truth *annam brahma, God in Matter* (Taittiriya Upanishad) India has been materially impoverished. The West, on the other hand, worshipped God in Matter and has been the beneficiary of the bounty of God in material terms. It is a necessary part of integral fulfilment, individual and collective, to regard the Presence of the Divine Spirit in Matter and pay full attention to its expression. From this point of view, Science and Technology, have done great service to humanity and India must fully exploit this knowledge without being drawn into misuse of it.

India's Destiny

AFTER THE CONGRESS session of 1914, Sri Aurobindo was interviewed by the correspondent of *The Hindu*, the leading paper of the South. He said in the course of his talk: "The old, petty forms and little narrow, make-believe activities are getting out of date. The world is changing rapidly around us and preparing for more colossal changes in the future. We must rise to the greatness of thought and action which it will demand upon the nations who hope to live. No, it is not in any of the old formal activities, but deeper down that I find signs of progress and hope. The last few years have been a period of silence and compression in which the awakened *virya* and *tejas* of the nation have been concentrating for a greater outburst of a better directed energy in the future.

"We are a nation of three hundred millions inhabiting a great country in which many civilisations have met, full of rich material and unused capacities. We must cease to think and act like the inhabitants of an obscure and petty village."

Question: *If you don't like our political methods, what would you advise us to do for the realisation of our destiny?*

A: Only by a general intellectual and spiritual awakening can this nation fulfil its destiny. Our limited information, our second-hand intellectual activities, our bounded interests, our narrow life of little family aims and small money-getting have prevented us from entering into the broad life of the world. Fortunately, there are ever-increasing signs of a widened outlook, richer intellectual output and numerous sparks of liberal genius which show that the necessary change is coming. No nation in modern times can grow great by politics alone. A rich and varied life, energetic in all its parts, is the condition of a sound, vigorous national existence. From this point of view also the last few years have been a great benefit to the country.....

“The new idea that should now lead us is the realisation of our nationhood not separate from, but in the future scheme of humanity. When it has realised its own national life and unity, India will still have a part to play in helping to bring about the unity of the nations.

“We Indians should begin to think seriously what part Indian thought, Indian intellect, Indian nationhood Indian culture have to fulfil in the general life of humanity...I am convinced and have long been convinced that a spiritual awakening, a re-awakening to the true self of a nation is the most important condition of our national greatness. The supreme *Indian* idea of the oneness of all men in God and its realisation inwardly and outwardly, increasingly even in social relations and the structure of society is destined, I believe, to govern the progress of the human race, India, if it chooses, can guide the world.”

And he concluded: “It is more important that the thought of India should come out of the philosophical school and renew its contact with life, and the spiritual life of India issue out of the cave and the temple and, adapting itself to new forms, lay its hand upon the world. I believe also that humanity is about to enlarge its scope by new knowledge, new powers and capacities, which will create as great a revolution in human life as the physical science of the nineteenth century. Here, too, India holds in her past, a little rusted and put out of use, the key of humanity's future.”¹⁹

Great Peace and Serenity

SRI AUROBINDO'S LIFE, during these years, was partan. He was following certain principles to the least detail. His relations with those around him in the house were more of a friends and companion than a Guru. He treated every one as his equal and Purani narrates an incident to the point. It appears once his foot touched Amrita (then a young associate) accidentally; immediately he sat up and said, "I beg your pardon." On another occasion when Amrita was berating the press compositor who had brought the proofs late because of his drunkenness, Sri Aurobindo came out and said: "You have no right to interfere in his personal life. It is meaningless to advise him. He has perfect freedom to drink. What you should tell him is to observe the terms of the contract and give the proofs regularly."

Among the visitors during this period (1914-1918) was a Danish painter, Johannes Hohlenberg, who did a portrait of Sri Aurobindo. Also Khasirao Jadhav, an old friend from Baroda who came specially to meet Sri Aurobindo in 1916.

Sri T. V. Kapali Sastry, a widely respected scholar and initiate of Madras, called on Sri Aurobindo in 1917. Sri Kapali Sastry was a premier disciple of Kavyakantha Ganapati Sastri (later known as Vasishtha Ganapati Muni) and was closely associated with Sri Ramana Maharshi of Arunachala. He was an adept in various branches of learning—Veda, Tantra, Ayurveda, Astrology etc. A poet and philosopher, he was deeply grounded in different lines of spiritual practice and yoga. He accepted an invitation to deliver a lecture in Pondicherry just in order to be able to meet Sri Aurobindo for whom he had developed an admiration from the Swadeshi days. And he had been an avid reader of the *Arya*. Sastry knew Bharati very well and an interview was arranged with Sri Aurobindo. This appears to have been a meeting between scholar and scholar, leading to another meeting, some six years later, of a totally different type under different circumstances.

B. Shiva Rao, secretary to Annie Besant who was leading the Home-Rule Movement at that time, called on Sri Aurobindo in 1917. He recalls this meeting in *The Hindu* of May 10, 1959:

“The Home-Rule Movement was at that time quickly gathering support and vitality mainly as a result of the internments (war-time). Some of us who were on the staff of ‘New India’ went out on trips to build up a campaign of organisation. One of these trips took me to Pondicherry where Sri Aurobindo had made his home after leaving Bengal in 1910. Even in those early days there was an atmosphere of great peace and serenity about him which left on me a deep, enduring impression. He spoke softly, almost in whispers. He thought Mrs. Besant was absolutely right in preaching Home Rule for India, as well as in her unqualified support of the Allies in the first World War against Germany...”

In the year 1918, when the British Government declared the Montagu Chelmsford Reforms, Mrs. Besant repeatedly asked Sri Aurobindo to give his opinion on them. Having retired from political activity, Sri Aurobindo did not wish to make a public pronouncement. But he wrote a letter which was published in the *New India* (August 10, 1918) under the name ‘An Indian Nationalist’. He describes the whole scheme as a cleverly constructed ‘Chinese puzzle’ in which even “a three days’ examination has failed to discover in them one atom of real power given to these new legislatures.” He adds: “And, as you say, the whole spirit is bad. Not even in the future is India to be allowed to determine its own destinies or its rate of progress! Self-determination, it seems, has gone into the waste-paper basket, with other scraps, I suppose.” He concludes: “The struggle cannot be avoided; it can only be evaded for the moment, and if you evade it now, you will have it tomorrow or the day after, with the danger of its taking a more virulent form.”²⁰

Mrinalini Passes Away

IT IS SAID that about the middle of December 1918, during a spell of heavy rains and storm, a framed photograph of Mrinalini in Aurobindo's rooms fell down and the glass broke to pieces. Later news came that Mrinalini had died in Calcutta on December 17, of influenza. At long last she had been permitted by Sri Aurobindo to come to Pondicherry and she was on her way from Ranchi when she caught this fever in Calcutta and succumbed to it.

In the course of a dignified and moving statement (dated August 26, 1931), her father Bhupal Chandra Bose writes:

“Sri Aurobindo first met Mrinalini at the house of her uncle S. J. Girish Chandra Bose in Calcutta in the course of his search for a mate to share his life, and chose her at first sight as his destined wife. Their marriage took place shortly afterwards in April 1901. It is not possible for the writer or for anybody else to say what psychical affinity existed between the two, but certain it is that as soon as he saw the girl, he made up his mind to marry her. The customary negotiations were carried on by Girish Babu on the bride's side. Sri Aurobindo was at the time employed either as a Professor or as Vice-Principal of the Gaekwar's College at Baroda. He was then 28 years 9 months old, and his wife was only 14 years and 3 months, the difference in age being over 14 years.

”The writer knows next to nothing about the married life of the couple at Baroda. After Sri Aurobindo came to Bengal and during the stormy years that followed, Mrinalini had little or no opportunity of living a householder's life in the quiet company of her husband. Her life during this period was one of continuous strain and suffering which she bore with the utmost patience and quietitude. She spent the greater period of the time either with Sri Aurobindo's maternal relatives at

Deoghar or with her parents at Shillong. She was present with her husband at the time of his arrest at 48, Grey Street in May 1908 and received a frightful mental shock of which the writer and others saw a most painful evidence in the delirium of her last illness ten years later.

“The writer is unable to say from his own knowledge how far Mrinalini agreed with and helped her husband in his public activities, but he can say this much for certain that she never stood in the way of his work. She never evinced any aspiration for public work.

“The writer cannot throw any light on the mutual relations between Mrinalini and her husband, except that they were characterised by a sincere though quiet affection on the side of the husband and a never questioning obedience from the wife. One can gather much in this respect from Sri Aurobindo’s published letters. After Sri Aurobindo left Bengal, the two never met again, but all who knew her could see how deeply she was attached to her husband and how she longed to join him at Pondicherry. The fates however decreed it otherwise...

“She paid several visits to her husband at Alipore Central Jail in the company of her father. She never evinced any visible agitation during those exciting times, but kept quiet and firm throughout.

“Sri Aurobindo never called his wife to Pondicherry for Sadhana. They never met again. Her father made a serious attempt after his retirement from Government service in 1916 to take her to Pondicherry but the attitude of Government at the time prevented him from realising this wish.

“These long years of separation (1910-18) she spent with her parents at Shillong and Ranchi, paying occasional visits to Calcutta. She devoted these years almost exclusively to meditation and the reading of religious literature which consisted for the most part of the writings of Swami Vivekananda and the teachings of his Great Master.

“The writer believes she perused all the published writings of the Swami and all the publications of the Udbodhan Office. Of these she has left behind an almost complete collection.

“Mrinalini often visited Sri Ma (widow of Parmahansa Dev) at the Udbodhan Office in Bagbazar, who treated her with great affection

calling her Bau-Ma (the normal Bengali appellation for daughter-in-law) in consideration of the fact that the Holy Mother regarded Sri Aurobindo as her son.

“Mrinalini desired at one time to receive diksha from one of the Sannyasins of the Ramakrishna Mission. Her father wrote to Sri Aurobindo for the necessary permission but the latter in reply advised her not to receive initiation from any one else and he assured her that he would send her all the spiritual help she needed. She was content therefore to remain without initiation.

“Mrinalini passed away in Calcutta in the 32nd year of her life on the 17th December, 1918, a victim of the fell scourge of influenza which swept over India in that dreaded year.

“There was nothing notable about her death. In fact but for the fate which united her for a part of her short life to one of the most remarkable and forceful personalities of the age, her life had nothing extraordinary about it.

“Nothing happens in the world without serving some purpose of the Divine Mother, and no doubt she came and lived to fulfil a Divine purpose which we may guess but can never know.

“For some time before she passed away, she had been selling her ornaments and giving away the proceeds in charity and what remained unsold, she left with her friend Miss Sudhira Bose, at the time Lady Superintendent of the Sister Nivedita School. Soon after her death Sudhira sold off the ornaments and the whole of the proceeds, some two thousand rupees was, with Sri Aurobindo’s permission, made over to the Ramakrishna Mission, and consituted into an endowment named after Mrinalini, out of the interest of which a girl student is maintained at the Sister Nivedita School.”²¹

India will be Free

A NOTABLE INTERVIEW of the year was the one given to A. B. Purani in December, 1918. It will be recalled that Ambalal B. Purani was younger brother of Chhotalal B. Purani who had received instructions from Sri Aurobindo during his Baroda days for revolutionary work. He had been an enthusiastic member of the group then formed and had now come with a view to getting Sri Aurobindo's permission for the revolutionary activity for which he and his group felt they were ready. He had corresponded with Sri Aurobindo earlier on matters of Sadhana, particularly after reading the *Arya*. Naturally Sri Aurobindo first enquired about the young man's spiritual practice. Purani describes the scene in *The Life of Sri Aurobindo*:

“I described my efforts and added, ‘Sadhana is all right, but it is difficult to concentrate on it so long as India is not free’.

Sri Aurobindo: Perhaps it may not be necessary to resort to revolutionary activity to free India.

A.B.P.: But without that how is the British Government to go from India?

Sri Aurobindo: That is another question; but if India can be free without revolutionary activity, why should you execute the plan? It is better to concentrate on the yoga-spiritual development.

A.B.P.: But India is a land that has Sadhana in its blood. When India is free, I believe thousands will devote themselves to yoga. But in the world of today who will listen to the truth or spirituality of slaves?

Sri Aurobindo: India has already decided to win freedom and so there will certainly be found leaders and men to work for that goal. But

all are not called to yoga. So, when you have the call, is it not better to concentrate upon it ? If you want to carry out the revolutionary programme you are free to do it, but I cannot give my consent to it.

A.B.P.: But it was you who gave us the inspiration and the start for revolutionary activity. Why do you now refuse to give your consent to its execution?

Sri Aurobindo: Because I have done the work and I know its difficulties. Young men come forward to join the movement being inspired by idealism and enthusiasm. But these elements do not last long. It becomes very difficult to observe exact discipline. Small groups begin to form within the organisation, rivalries grow between groups and even between individuals. There is competition for leadership. The agents of the government generally manage to join these organisations from the very beginning. And so they are unable to act effectively. Sometimes they sink so low as to quarrel even for money.

A.B.P.: But even supposing that I admit and agree to sadhana, that is, yoga, as being of greater importance and even intellectually understand that I should concentrate upon it, my difficulty is that I feel intensely that I must do something for the freedom of India. I have been unable to sleep soundly for the last two years and a half. I can remain quiet if I make a very strong effort. But the concentration of my whole being turns towards India's freedom. It is difficult for me to sleep till that is secured.

Sri Aurobindo remained silent for two or three minutes. It was a long pause. Then he said: Suppose an assurance is given to you that India will be free?

A.B.P.: Who can give such an assurance?

I could feel the echo of doubt and challenge in my own question. Again he remained silent for three or four minutes. Then he looked at me and added: Suppose I give you the assurance?

I paused for half a minute, considered the question within myself and said: If you give the assurance, I can accept it.

Sri Aurobindo: Then I give you the assurance that India will be free.

Purani relates how he then spoke of other things and, “it was time for me to leave. The question of Indian freedom again arose in my mind, and at the time of taking leave, after I had got up to go, I could not repress the question—it was a question of life for me—‘Are you quite sure that India will be free?’

Sri Aurobindo became very serious. His gaze was fixed at the sky that appeared beyond the window. Then he looked at me and putting his fist on the table he said:

‘You can take it from me, it is as certain as the rising of the sun tomorrow. The decree has already gone forth, it may not be long in coming’.”

Letter to Barin

EARLY IN 1920, Barindra Kumar Ghose, Sri Aurobindo's younger brother, who had been sentenced to transportation for life in the Andamans, was released. He visited a number of spiritual centres including the Prabartaka Sangha of Motilal Roy in Chandernagore and what he saw filled him with disappointment. He wrote to Sri Aurobindo voicing his mood and also asking to be initiated into his Yoga though he was far from being fit. Sri Aurobindo's reply was a classic: though the developments and trends that it surveyed were of long ago, there is a certain current relevance in many of the passages, meriting a reproduction of the letter in full (translated from the original in Bengali). Besides, the autobiographical element in the letter is specially valuable for the light it sheds on his inner state and outer plans as they stood at that point in time.

Here is the letter:²²

A letter of Sri Aurobindo to his Brother

Pondicherry
(April 7, 1920)

Dear Barin,

I have received your three letters (and another one today), but up till now I have not managed to write a reply. That now I sit to write is itself a miracle, because I write letters once in a blue moon, especially letters in Bengali. This is something I have not done even once in the last five or six years. If I can finish the letter and post it, the miracle will be complete.

First, about your yoga. You want to give me the charge of your yoga, and I am willing to accept it. But this means giving it to Him who, openly or secretly, is moving me and you by His divine power. And you

should know that the inevitable result of this will be that you will have to follow the path of yoga which He has given me, the path I call the integral Yoga. This is not exactly what we did in Alipur jail, or what you did during your imprisonment in the Andamans. What I started with, what Lele gave me, what I did in jail—all that was a searching for the path, a circling around looking here and there, touching, taking up, handling, testing this and that of all the old partial yogas, getting a more or less complete experience of one and then going off in pursuit of another. Afterwards, when I came to Pondicherry, this unsteady condition ceased. The indwelling Guru of the world indicated my path to me completely, its full theory, the ten limbs of the body of the yoga. These ten years he has been making me develop it in experience; it is not yet finished. It may take another two years. And so long as it is not finished, I probably will not be able to return to Bengal. Pondicherry is the appointed place for the fulfilment of my yoga—except indeed for one part of it, that is, the work. The centre of my work is Bengal, but I hope its circumference will be the whole of India and the whole world.

Later I will write to you what my path of yoga is. Or, if you come here, I will tell you. In these matters the spoken word is better than the written. For the present I can only say that its fundamental principle is to make a synthesis and unity of integral knowledge, integral works and integral devotion and raising this above the mental level to the supramental level of the vijnana, to give it a complete perfection. The defect of the old yoga was that, knowing the mind and reason and knowing the Spirit, it remained satisfied with spiritual experience in the mind. But the mind can grasp only the fragmentary; it cannot completely seize the infinite, the undivided. The mind's way to seize it is through the trance of samadhi, the liberation of moksha, the extinction of nirvana, and so forth. It has no other way. Someone here may or there indeed obtain this featureless liberation, but what is the gain? The Spirit, the Self, the Divine is always there. What the Divine wants is for man to embody Him here, in the individual and in the collectivity—to realise God in life. The old system of yoga could not synthesise or unify the Spirit and life; it dismissed the world as an illusion or a transient play of God. The result has been a diminution of the power of life and the decline of India. The Gita says: *utsideyur ime loka na kuryam ced aham*, "These peoples would crumble to pieces if I did not do actions." Verily "these peoples" of India have gone down to ruin. What

kind of spiritual perfection is it if a few ascetics, renunciates, holy men and realised beings attain liberation, if a few devotees dance in a frenzy of love, god intoxication and bliss, and an entire race, devoid of life and intelligence, sinks to the depths of darkness and inertia? First one must have all sorts of partial experience on the mental level, flooding the mind with spiritual delight and illuminating it with spiritual light: afterwards one climbs upwards. Unless one makes this upward climb, this climb to the supramental level, it is not possible to know the ultimate secret of world-existence; the riddle of the world is not solved. There, the cosmic Ignorance which consists of the duality of Self and world, Spirit and life, is abolished. Then one need no longer look on the world as an illusion: the world is an eternal play of God, the perpetual manifestation of the Self. Then is it possible fully to know and realise God—*samagram mam jnatum pravistum*, “to know and enter into Me completely”, as the Gita says. The physical body, life, mind and reason, Supermind, the Bliss-existence—these are the Spirit’s five levels. The higher we climb, the nearer comes a state of highest perfection of man’s spiritual evolution. When we rise to the Supermind, it becomes easy to rise to the Bliss. The status of indivisible and infinite Bliss becomes firmly established—not only in the timeless Supreme Reality but in the body, in the world, in life. Integral existence, integral consciousness, integral bliss blossom out and take form in life. This endeavour is the central clue of my yogic path, its fundamental idea.

But it is not an easy thing. After fifteen years I am only now rising into the lowest of the three levels of the Supermind and trying to draw up into it all the lower activities. But when the process is complete, there is not the least doubt that God through me will give this supramental perfection to others with less difficulty. Then my real work will begin. I am not impatient for the fulfilment of my work. What is to happen will happen in God’s appointed time. I am not disposed to run like a madman and plunge into the field of action on the strength of my little ego. Even if my work were not fulfilled, I would not be disturbed. This work is not mine, it is God’s, I listen to no one else’s call. When I am moved by God, I will move...

I know that Bengal is not ready. The spiritual flood which has come is for the most part a new form of the old. It is not a real change. But it too was needed. Bengal has been awakening within itself all the

old yogas in order to exhaust their ingrained tendencies, extract their essence and with it fertilise the soil. First it was the turn of Vedanta: and doctrine of non-dualism, asceticism, the Illusionism of Shankara, and so forth. Now, according to your description, it is the turn of the Vaishnava religion: the divine play, love, losing oneself in the delight of spiritual emotion. All this is very old and unsuitable for the new age. It cannot last, for such excitement has no lasting power. But the Vaishnava way has this merit, that it keeps a certain connection between God and the world and gives a meaning to life. But because it is a partial thing, the connection and the meaning are not complete. The sectarianism you have noticed was inevitable. This is the law of the mind: to take one part and call it the whole, excluding all the other parts. The realised man who comes with an idea keeps, even if he leans on the part, some awareness of the whole—although he may not be able to give it form. But his disciples are not able to do this, because the form is lacking. They are tying up their bundles—let them. When God descends completely on the country, the bundles will open of themselves. All these things are signs of incompleteness and immaturity, I am not disturbed by them. Let the force of spirituality have its play in the country in whatever way and through as many sects as there may be. Afterwards we shall see. This is the infancy, the embryonic state, even, of the new age, just a hint, not yet the beginning.

Then about Motilal's groups. What Motilal got from me is the first foundation, the base of my yoga—surrender, equality etc. He has been working on these things; the work is not complete. One special feature of this yoga is that until the realisation has been raised to a somewhat elevated level, the base does not become solid. Motilal now wants to rise higher. In the beginning he had a number of old fixed notions. Some have dropped off, some still remain. At first it was the notion of asceticism—he wanted to create an Aurobindo order of monks. Now his mind has admitted that asceticism is not needed, but the old impression in his vital being has still not been thoroughly wiped out. This is why he advocates renunciation and asceticism while remaining a part of the life of the world. He has realised the necessity of renouncing desire, but he has not fully been able to grasp how the renunciation of desire can be reconciled with the experience of bliss. Moreover, he took to my yoga—as is natural to the Bengali nature—not so much from the side of knowledge as from the side of devotion and service. Knowledge has

blossomed out a little; but much more is yet to come, and the fog of sentimentality has not been dissipated, though it is not so thick as it used to be. He has not been able to get beyond the limitations of the sattwic nature, the temperament of the moral man. The ego is still there. In a word, his development is progressing, it is not complete. But I am in no hurry. I am letting him develop according to his own nature. I do not want to fashion everybody in the same mould. The real thing will be the same in all, but it will take many aspects and many forms. Everyone grows from within; I do not wish to model from outside. Motilal has got the fundamental thing; all the rest will come.

You ask, "Why is Motilal tying up his bundle?" I will explain. First, some people have gathered round him who are in contact with him and with me. What he received from me, they too are receiving. Secondly, I wrote a small article in *Prabartak* called "About Society" in which I spoke about the *sangha* or community. I do not want a community based on division. I want a community based upon the spirit giving form to the unity of the Spirit. This idea Motilal has taken up under the name *deva sangha* (divine community). I have spoken in my English writings of the "divine life". Nolini has translated this as *deva-jivana*. The community of those who want the *deva-jivana* is the *jivandeva*. Motilal has begun an attempt to establish this kind of community in seed-form in Chandernagore and to spread it across the country. If the shadow of the fragile ego falls upon this sort of endeavour, the community turns into a sect. The idea may easily creep in that the community which will be there in the end is this very one, that everything will be the circumference of this sole centre, that all who are outside it are not of the fold or, even if they are, that they have gone astray, because they are not in accord with our current line of thinking. If Motilal is making this mistake—he may have some tendency to make it, though I do not know whether he has done so or not—it will not do much harm, the mistake will pass. Much work has been done and continues to be done for us by Motilal and his little group—something nobody else has been able to do up till now. the divine power is working in him, there is no doubt about that.

You will perhaps ask, "What is the need of a sangha? Let me be free and fill every vessel. Let all become one, let all take place within that vast unity." All this is true, but it is only one side of the truth. Our business is not with formless Spirit only; we have to direct life as well.

Without shape and form, life has no effective movement. It is the formless that has taken form, and that assumption of name and form is not a caprice of Maya. The positive necessity of form has brought about the assumption of form. We do not want to exclude any of the world's activities. Politics, trade, social organisation, poetry, art, literature—all will remain. But all will be given a new life, a new form. Why did I leave politics? Because our politics is not the genuine Indian thing; it is a European import, an imitation of European ways. You and I also engaged in politics of the European style. If we had not done so, the country would not have risen, and we would not have had the experience or obtained a full development. Even now there is a need for it, not so much in Bengal as in the other provinces of India. But now the time has come to take hold of the substance instead of extending the shadow. We have to awaken the true soul of India and to do everything in accordance with it. For the last ten years I have been silently pouring my influence into this foreign political vessels and there has been some result. I can continue to do this wherever necessary. But if I took up that work openly again, associating with the political leaders and working with them, it would be supporting an alien law of being and a false political life. People now want to spiritualise politics—Gandhi, for instance. But he can't get hold of the right way. What is Gandhi doing? Making a hodge-podge called *satyagraha* out of "*Ahimsa paramo dharma*", Jainism, *hartal*, passive resistance etc; bringing a sort of Indianised Tolstoyism into the country. The result if there is any lasting result—will be a sort of Indianised Bolshevism. I have no objection to his work; let each one act according to his own inspiration. But it is not the real thing. If the spiritual force is poured into these impure forms—the wine of the spirit into these unbaked vessels the imperfect things will break apart and spill and waste the wine. Or else the spiritual force will evaporate and only the impure form remain. It is the same in every field of activity. I could use my spiritual influence; it would give strength to those who received it and they would work with great energy. But the force would be expended in shaping the image of a monkey and setting it up in the temple of Shiva. If the monkey is brought to life it may grow powerful, and in the guise of the devotee Hanuman do much work for Rama—so long as the life and strength remain. But in the temple of India we want not Hanuman but the Godhead, the Avatar, Rama himself.

I can associate with everyone, but only in order to draw them all on to the true path, while keeping the spirit and form of our ideal intact. If that is not done we will lose our way and the true work will not be accomplished. If we are spread out everywhere as individuals, something no doubt will be done; if we are spread everywhere in the form of a sangha, a hundred times more will be accomplished. But the time has not yet come for this. If we try to give it form hastily, it will not be the exact thing I want. The sangha will at first be in a diffused form. Those who have accepted the ideal, although bound together, will work in different places. Afterwards, bound into a sangha with a form like a spiritual commune, they will shape all their activities according to the Self and according to the needs of the age. Not a fixed and rigid form like that of the old Aryan society, not a stagnant back-water but a free form that can spread itself out like the sea with its multitudinous waves—engulfing this, inundating that, absorbing all—and as this continues, a spiritual community will be established. This is my present idea; it is not yet fully developed. What is being developed is what came to me in my meditations at Alipur. I shall see what shape it finally takes later. The result is in God's hands—let His Will be done. Motilal's little group is just one experiment. He is looking for the means to engage in trade, industry, agriculture, etc. through his sangha. I am giving force and watching. There may be some materials for the future and some useful suggestions to be found in it. Do not judge it by its current merits and demerits or its present limitations. It is now in a wholly initial and experimental stage.

Next I will discuss some of the specific points raised in your letter. I do not want to say much here about what you write as regards your yoga. It will be more convenient to do so when we meet. But there is one thing you write, that you admit no physical connection with men, that you look upon the body as a corpse. And yet your mind wants to live the worldly life. Does this condition still persist? To look upon the body as a corpse is a sign of asceticism, the path of nirvana. The worldly does not go along with this idea. There must be delight in everything, in the body as much as in the spirit. The body is made of consciousness, the body is a form of God. I see God in everything in the world. *Sarvam idam brahma, vasudevah survamiti* (“All this here is the Brahman”, “Vasudeva, the Divine, is all”)—this vision brings the universal delight. Concrete waves of this bliss flow even through the body. In this condition, filled with spiritual feeling, one can live the worldly life, get

married or do anything else. In every activity one finds a blissful self-expression of the divine. I have for a long time been transforming on the mental level all the objects and experiences of the mind and senses into delight. Now they are all taking the form of supramental delight. In this condition there is the perfect vision and experience of Sachchidananda—the divine Existence, Consciousness and Bliss.

Next, in reference to the divine community, you write, “I am not a god, only some much-hammered and tempered steel.” I have already spoken about the real meaning of the divine community. No one is a god, but each man has a god within him. To manifest Him is the aim of the divine life. That everyone can do. I admit that certain individuals have greater or lesser capacities. I do not, however, accept as accurate your description of yourself. But whatever the capacity, if once God places his finger upon the man and his spirit awakes greater or lesser and all the rest make little difference. The difficulties may be more, it may take more time, what is manifested may not be the same—but even this is not certain. The god within takes no account of all these difficulties and deficiencies; he forces his way out. Were there few defects in my mind and heart and life and body? Few difficulties? Did it not take time? Did God hammer at me sparingly—day after day, moment after moment? Whether I have become a god or something else I do not know. But I have become or am becoming something—whatever God desired. This is sufficient. And it is the same with everybody; not by our own strength but by God’s strength is this yoga done.

It is good that you have taken charge of *Narayan*. The magazine began well, but later it drew a narrow sectarian line around itself, fostered feelings of faction and began to rot. At first Nolini wrote for *Narayan*, but later he was obliged to turn elsewhere, because it gave no scope to free opinion. There must be the free air of an open room, otherwise how can there be any power of life? Free light and free air are the primary nourishment of the life-force. At present it is not possible for me to contribute anything. Later I may be able to give something, but *Prabartak* also has its claim on me. It may at first be a little difficult to satisfy calls from both directions. We shall see when I begin to write in Bengali again. At the moment I am short of time: it is not possible for me to write for anything except the *Arya*. Each month I alone have to provide 64 pages; it is no small task. And then there is poetry to write; the practice of yoga takes time; time is also needed for rest. Most of

“On Society”, which Saurin has with him, has probably appeared in *Prabartak*. The rest of what he has must be a draft; the final revision has not been done. Let me have a look at it first. We shall see then whether it can be published in *Narayan*.

You write about *Prabartak* that people cannot understand it, it is misty, a riddle. I have been hearing the same complaint all along. I admit that there is not much clear-cut thinking in Motilal’s writing; he writes too densely. But he has inspiration, force, power. In the beginning Nolini and Moni wrote for *Prabartak* and even then people called it a riddle. But Nolini’s thinking is clear-cut, Moni’s writing direct and powerful. There is the same complaint about the *Arya*; people can’t understand it. Who wants to give so much thought and consideration to his reading? But in spite of this *Prabartak* was doing a lot of work in Bengal, and at that time people did not have the idea that I was writing for it. If now it does not have the same effect, the reason is that now people are rushing towards activity and excitement. On one side there is the flood of devotion, on the other side the efforts to make money. But during the ten-year period that Bengal was lifeless and inert *Prabartak* was its only fountain of strength. It has helped a lot in changing the mood of Bengal. I do not think its work is over yet.

In this connection let me tell you briefly one or two things I have been observing for a long time. It is my belief that the main cause of India’s weakness is not subjection, nor poverty, nor a lack of spirituality or religion, but a diminution of the power of thought, the spread of ignorance in the birthplace of knowledge. Everywhere I see an inability or unwillingness to think—incapacity of thought or “thought-phobia”. This may have been all right in the mediaeval period, but now this attitude is the sign of a great decline. The mediaeval period was a night, the day of victory for the man of ignorance; in the modern world it is the time of victory for the man of knowledge. He who can delve into and learn the truth about the world by thinking more, searching more, labouring more, gains more power. Take a look at Europe. You will see two things: a wide limitless sea of the thought and the play of a huge and rapid, yet disciplined force. The whole power of Europe is here. It is by virtue of this power that she has been able to swallow the world, like our *tapaswis* of old, whose might held even the gods of the universe in terror, suspense, subjection. People say that Europe is rushing into the jaws of destruction. I do not think so. All these revolutions, all these

upsettings are the first stages of a new creation. Now take a look at India. A few solitary giants aside, everywhere there is your simple man, that is, your average man, one who will not think, cannot think, has not an ounce of strength, just a momentary excitement. India wants the easy thought, the simple word; Europe wants the deep thought, the deep word. In Europe even ordinary labourers think, want to know everything. They are not satisfied to know things halfway, but want to delve deeply into them. The difference lies here. But there is a fatal limitation to the power and thought of Europe. When she enters the field of spirituality, her thought-power stops working. There Europe sees everything as a riddle, nebulous metaphysics, yogic hallucination—"It rubs its eyes as in smoke and can see nothing clearly." But now in Europe not a little effort is being made to surmount even this limitation. Thanks to our forefathers, we have the spiritual sense, and whoever has this sense has within his reach such knowledge, such power, as with one breath could blow all the immense strength of Europe away like a blade of grass. But power is needed to get this power. We however, are not worshippers of power; we are worshippers of the easy way. But one cannot obtain power by the easy way. Our forefathers swam in a vast sea of thought and gained a vast knowledge; they established a vast civilisation. But as they went forward on their path they were overcome by exhaustion and weariness. The force of their thought decreased and along with it decreased the force of their creative power. Our civilisation has become a stagnant backwater, our religion a bigotry of externals, our spirituality a faint glimmer of light or a momentary wave of intoxication. So long as this state of things lasts, any permanent resurgence of India is impossible.....

...The meaning of this extraordinarily long letter is that I too am tying up my bundle. But I believe this bundle is like the net of Saint Peter, teeming with the catch of the Infinite. I am not going to open the bundle just now. If it is opened too soon, the catch may escape. Nor am I going back to Bengal just now—not because Bengal is not ready, but because I am not ready. If the unripe goes amid the unripe, what can he accomplish?

Your Sejdada.

Letter to Baptista

MUKUL CHANDRA DE, later Principal of the Calcutta School of Art, came to Pondicherry in 1919. He drew a portrait of Sri Aurobindo which, however, was not very successful.

There appeared an interesting letter in *The Modern Review of* November 1919 by Rabindranath Tagore relating to a review of his novel, *Home and the World*. It reads:

“I have not read Jadu Babu’s review of my book, but I feel sure that he could never mean to say that Sri Aurobindo Ghose belongs to the same type of humanity as Sandip of my story. My acquaintance with the literature of our contemporary politics being casual and desultory, I do not, even to this day, definitely know what is the political standpoint of Aurobindo Ghose. But this I positively know that he is a great man, one of the greatest we have and therefore liable to be misunderstood even by his friends. What I myself feel for him is not mere admiration but reverence for his depth of spirituality, his largeness of vision and his literary gifts, extraordinary in imaginative insight and expression. He is a true Rishi and a poet combined, and I still repeat my Namaskar which I offered to him when he was first assailed by the trouble which ultimately made him an exile from the soil of Bengal.”

In the meanwhile the Nationalists were organising their strength and resources. Tilak who was back from Mandalay was heading the gathering forces and seems to have asked Joseph Baptista, Barrister, to request Sri Aurobindo, on behalf of the Socialist Democratic party, to accept the editorship of a paper they proposed to bring out as the authentic voice of the Nationalist Movement. They thus wanted to get Sri Aurobindo back into the mainstream of Indian Politics. Sri Aurobindo wrote an extensive letter in reply explaining the nature of his quest and the reasons that led him to decline the offer. The letter²³ reads:

Pondicherry
January 5, 1920

Dear Baptista,

Your offer is a tempting one, but I regret that I cannot answer it in the affirmative. It is due to you that I should state explicitly my reasons. In the first place I am not prepared at present to return to British India. This is quite apart from any political obstacle. I understand that up to last September the Government of Bengal (and probably the Government of Madras also) were opposed to my return to British India and that practically this opposition meant that if I went back I should be interned or imprisoned under one or other of the beneficent Acts which are apparently still to subsist as helps in ushering in the new era of trust and cooperation. I do not suppose other Governments would be any more delighted by my appearance in their respective provinces. Perhaps the King's Proclamation may make a difference, but that is not certain since, as I read it, it does not mean an amnesty, but an act of gracious concession and benevolence limited by the discretion of the Viceroy. Now I have too much work on my hands to waste my time in the leisured ease of an involuntary Government guest. But even if I was assured of an entirely free action and movement, I should yet not go just now. I came to Pondicherry in order to have freedom and tranquility for a fixed object having nothing to do with present politics—in which I have taken no direct part since my coming here, though what I could do for the country in my own way I have constantly done,—and until it is accomplished, it is not possible for me to resume any kind of public activity. But if I were in British India. I should be obliged to plunge at once into action of different kinds. Pondicherry is my place of retreat, my cave of tapasya, not of the ascetic kind, but of a brand of my own invention. I must finish that, I must be internally armed and equipped for my work before I leave it.

Next in the matter of the work itself. I do not at all look down on politics or political action or consider I have got above them. I have always laid a dominant stress and I now lay an entire stress on the spiritual life, but my idea of spirituality has nothing to do with ascetic withdrawal or contempt or disgust of secular things. There is to me nothing secular, all human activity is for me a thing to be included in a complete spiritual life, and the importance of politics at the present

time is very great. But my line and intention of political activity would differ considerably from anything now current in the field. I entered into political action and continued it from 1903 to 1910 with one aim and one alone, to get into the mind of the people a settled will for freedom and the necessity of a struggle to achieve it in place of the futile ambling Congress methods till then in vogue. That is now done and the Amritsar Congress is the seal upon it. The will is not as practical and compact nor by any means as organised and sustained in action as it should be, but there is the will and plenty of strong and able leaders to guide it. I consider that in spite of the inadequacy of the Reforms, the will to self-determination, if the country keeps its present temper, as I have no doubt it will, is bound to prevail before long. What preoccupies me now is the question what it is going to do with its self-determination, how will it use its freedom, on what lines is it going to determine its future?

You may ask why not come out and help, myself, so far as I can, in giving a lead? But my mind has a habit of running inconveniently ahead of the times,—some might say, out of time altogether into the world of the ideal. Your party, you say, is going to be a social democratic party. Now I believe in something which might be called social democracy, but not in any of the forms now current, and I am not altogether in love with the European kind, however great an improvement it may be on the past. I hold that India having a spirit of her own and a governing temperament proper to her own civilisation, should in politics as in everything else strike out her own original path and not stumble in the wake of Europe. But this is precisely what she will be obliged to do, if she has to start on the road in her present chaotic and unprepared condition of mind. No doubt people talk of India developing on her own lines, but nobody seems to have very clear or sufficient ideas as to what those lines are to be. In this matter I have formed ideals and certain definite ideas of my own, in which at present very few are likely to follow me,—since they are governed by an uncompromising spiritual idealism of an unconventional kind and would be unintelligible to many and an offence and stumbling-block to a great number. But I have not as yet any clear and full idea of the practical lines; I have no formed programme. In a word, I am feeling my way in my mind and am not ready for either propaganda or action. Even if I were it would mean for some time ploughing my lonely furrow or at least freedom to take my own way. As the editor of your paper, I should be bound to voice the

opinion of others and reserve my own, and while I have full sympathy with the general ideas of the advanced parties so far as concerns the action of the present moment and, if I were in the field, would do all I could to help them, I am almost incapable by nature of limiting myself in that way at least to the extent that would be requisite.

Excuse the length of this screed. I thought it necessary to explain fully so as to avoid giving you the impression that I declined your request from any affectation or reality of spiritual aloofness or wish to shirk the call of the country or want of sympathy with the work you and others are so admirably doing. I repeat my regret that I am compelled to disappoint you.

Yours sincerely,
Aurobindo Ghose

Return of the Richards

PAUL AND MIRRA RICHARD who had to return to France in 1915 did not have to stay there for long. Paul secured an assignment in Japan and both of them reached there in April 1916 and continued to stay in that country for four years. It was there that they met Rabindranath Tagore, W. Pearson and Rash Behari Bose. Tagore invited Mirra to come and take charge of Santiniketan.' But she did not accept the offer because she knew by this time that her work was definitely with Sri Aurobindo.

The Richards returned to Pondicherry by sea on 24 April 1920. They first stayed in hotels and then moved to a rented house (Bayoud House). Very soon they resumed their meetings with Sri Aurobindo, the old evening and weekly sessions. At times there would be sittings for automatic writing too.

On August 15, 1920 Motilal Roy started a weekly paper, Standard Bearer, for the inaugural issue of which Sri Aurobindo wrote the leading article 'Ourselves'. He contributed some articles for a few issues. The Prabartak Sangha was then publishing some books of Sri Aurobindo.

In the month of November there were heavy rains and there was danger of the roof of Bayoud House collapsing. Sri Aurobindo asked Mirra with her attendant-companion, Dorothy Hodgson, to move to his own house forthwith. That is how Mirra joined the household on November 24, 1920.

This marked a radical change in the life of the group. Slowly things were brought into some kind of shape and Sri Aurobindo's needs came to be attended to with special care. Mirra kept herself in the background but her presence and influence gradually began to make itself felt for the betterment of everything.

Slowly the number of inmates began to increase, Barin being a notable addition. Motilal Roy and his wife who had arrived for an intense pursuit of yoga were not too happy with the changes and despite Sri Aurobindo's expressed disapproval, they left Pondicherry on August 10, 1921. Thereafter Sri Aurobindo slowly withdrew, and then dissociated himself, from the Chandernagore group altogether.

Some time in 1920 the inmates of the house and a few other close friends started gathering in the verandah upstairs in the afternoons (between 4 and 4.30). Sri Aurobindo would come and join them leisurely and some talk would take place on topics of a general or a special nature like *sadhana*. On occasions there was no talk but only a silent sitting. These meetings took the form of collective meditations later on when Mirra joined.

A number of notable persons visited during 1920-22, among them being W.W. Pearson of Santiniketan who had known the Richards in Japan; S. Duraiswami Iyer of Madras, a brilliant intellectual and famous lawyer who later helped the Ashram establish itself; Mrinalini Chattopadhyaya who taught Mirra how to wear the *sari*; Dr. James Cousins, Sarala Devi Chowdhurani, Col. Joshva Wedgewood (M.P. from England).

Vedantic Yoga and “Tantric Yoga”

THE MOTILAL ROY episode (1910-1921) was more than an individual matter between a Guru and a disciple. It had more overtones. Apart from everything else, it was around Motilal that Sri Aurobindo's first attempt at projection of spiritual Consciousness and Power in the field of practical life was made. A good many details have come to light by the publication of a revealing book, *Light to Superlight*, by the Prabartak Sangha in 1972, on the occasion of Sri Aurobindo's Birth Centenary. Considerable correspondence in code between 1910 and 1912 was, we understand, destroyed to prevent its falling into the hands of the police on the eve of a search of the residence of Roy. The twenty-six letters that have survived are now published in this book with an informative and brilliant commentary by Arun Chandra Dutt, a close associate of Motilal Roy. He had also met and known Sri Aurobindo. His account of the background and attendant circumstances of the contents of the letters—notwithstanding a few factual errors—is very helpful in understanding the relation that obtained between Motilal and Sri Aurobindo and the work that was sought to be done by their coming together.

The commentator unravels code words: tantric yoga means revolutionary activity (and not yoga of the tantric type); 'tantric books' refers to revolvers reached to Chandernagore from Pondicherry. Similarly he gives clues to the identities of 'Psalmody', 'Parthasarathy' etc. and gives a glimpse into the revolutionary activities that went on during those days under the direction and inspiration of Sri Aurobindo and his associates through Motilal and his companions. Motilal dates his connection with Sri Aurobindo from February 21, 1910. The first message he received from Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry was sent through Sudarshan Chatterjee whom he had sent from Chandernagore to enquire

about the safety and well-being of the leader in exile. It was a blank sheet of paper with three words on it in pencil: they were three mantras, Brahma Mantra, Kali Mantra, Vasudeva Mantra; Motilal received them on the holy day of Akshay Tiritiya (May 11, 1910) which he regarded as specially significant.

The very first listed letter gives an idea of the monetary stringency around Sri Aurobindo. He writes: "The situation just now is that we have 1½ (Rupees) or so in hand...No doubt God will provide, but he has contracted a bad habit of waiting till the last moment."

To select a few relevant items from the subsequent letters: In reply to a question as to why a *Sannyasin* needs money to be collected for him, Sri Aurobindo answers categorically:

"I have not taken *sannyasa* but am practising yoga as a householder. The Yoga I am practising has not the ghost of a connection with *sannyasa*. It is a Yoga meant for life and life only." Then he defines his objectives: "There are four points of the *siddhi* roughly, moral, mental, physical and practical. Starting from December 1908, the moral has taken three years and a half and may now be considered complete. The mental has taken two years of regular *sadhana* and for the present purpose may be considered complete. The physical is backward and nearing completion only in the immunity from disease, which I am now attempting successfully to perfect and test by exposure to abnormal conditions. The physical also does not matter so much for practical purposes, as the moral, mental and a certain number of practical *siddhis* are sufficient.

"It is these practical *siddhis* that alone cause delay. I have had first to prove to myself their existence and utility; secondly to develop these in myself so as to be working forces; thirdly, to make them actually effective for life and impart them to others." Then speaking of his future work: "I may say briefly that I have been given a religious and philosophic mission to re-explain the Veda and Vedanta (Upanishads) in the ancient sense which I have recovered by actual experience in Yoga and to popularise the new system of Yoga (new in arrangement and object) which has been revealed to me and which, as I progress, I am imparting to the young men staying with me and to others in Pondicherry. I have also to spread certain ideas about God and life by literary work, speech, and practice, to try to bring about certain social

changes and finally, to do a certain work for my country in particular, as soon as the means are put in my hands. All this to be done by God's help only and not to be begun till things and myself are ready."

He spells out his immediate concerns: "What I am attempting is to establish the normal workings of the *siddhis* in life i.e. (1) the perceptions of thoughts, feelings and happenings of other beings and in other places throughout the world without any information by speech or any other data (2) the communication of the ideas and feelings I select to others (individuals, groups, nations) by mere transmission of will-power (3) the silent compulsion on them to act according to these communicated ideas and feelings (4) the determining of events, activities and result of action throughout the world by pure will-power."

There will be occasion later in these pages to know from him to what extent he succeeded in his "attempt to apply knowledge and power to the events and happenings of the world without the necessary instrumentality of physical action."

Then there is information on the circumstances leading to Sri Aurobindo's translating the Sagar Sangeet of C. R. Das. It appears Motilal approached the eminent counsel with a letter from Sri Aurobindo concerning his financial situation. Motilal writes: "I went to Das with Sri Aurobindo's letter. Sri Das sat for a while thinking, then he asked me to come and see him on another day. I went to him on the appointed date. He took out his book of poems, Sagar Sangeet and told me, 'If Sri Aurobindo translates this into English for me, I shall give him one thousand rupees for this work.' I reported the talk to Sri Aurobindo, who wanted the book Sagar Sangeet to be sent to him. Sri Aurobindo made two sets of English translation (so far as we remember)—one in rhyme, the other unrhymed. Das paid the sum in course of some time."

The Editor cites Nolini Kanta Gupta as saying, "Sri Aurobindo took only two or three days to complete this translation—one may say almost at one stretch of breath in an easy flow of spontaneous inspiration."

It is interesting to read that among the books Sri Aurobindo asked for were: *The Master as I saw him* by Nivedita; and R. C. Dutt's Bengali translation of the Vedas.

Even as early as that, the problem of corruption seems to have raised its head. For finding that the monies due to him from the sale of the family garden property at Murari Pukur Bagan in Calcutta, had not reached him but held up for an unconscionable length of time by intermediaries, Sri Aurobindo observes: “The habit of defalcation of money for noble and philanthropic purposes in which usually the ego is largely beneficiary, is one of the curses of our movement and so long as it is continued, Lukshmee will not return to this country”. He writes again in another letter: “But there is little hope of money once swallowed by a patriot being disgorged again. His philanthropic stomach digests sovereignty.”

Then there is mention of one R. S. Sharma whom Sri Aurobindo refused to see as he got “a warning against him from within” and he turned out to be a police spy (later he was knighted by the British Government!)

Advising about the prospective Review, the *Arya*, Sri Aurobindo writes: “My new theory of the Veda will appear, as also my translation and explanation of the Upanishads, a series of essays giving my system of Yoga and a host of Vedanta philosophy (not Shankara’s but Vedic-Vedanta) giving the Upanishadic foundation of my theory of ideal life towards which humanity must move. You will see so far as my share is concerned, it will be the intellectual side of my work for the world.”

Objecting to the message “about an Aurobindo Math” he writes; “You must understand that my mission is not to create maths, asceties and sannyasis, but to call back the souls of the strong to the Lila of Krishna and Kali. That is my teaching as you can see from the review and my name must never be connected with monastic forms or the monastic ideal. Every monastic movement since the time of Buddha has left India weaker and for a very obvious reason. Renunciation of life is one thing; to make life itself—national, individual, world-life—greater and more divine is another. You cannot enforce one ideal on the country without weakening the other. You cannot take away the best from life and yet leave life stronger and greater. Renunciation of ego, acceptance of God in life is the yoga I teach—no other renunciation.”

There is an interesting comment on the reactions to the *Arya*: “It is regrettable that Bengal should be unable to find anything in the ‘*Arya*.’ but not surprising. The intellect of Bengal has been so much fed on

chemical tablets of thought and hot-spiced foods that anything strong and substantial is indigestible to it. Moreover people in India are accustomed only to second-hand thoughts—the old familiar ideas of the six philosophies, Patanjali etc. etc. Any new presentation of life and thought upsets their expectations and is unintelligible to them. The thought of the *'Arya'* demands close thinking from the reader; it does not spare him the trouble of thinking and understanding and the minds of the people have long been accustomed to have the trouble of thought spared them. They know how to indulge their minds, they have forgotten how to exercise them.

“It does not matter very much just now, so long as the people who practise the Yoga, read and profit. The *Arya* presents a new philosophy and a new method of Yoga and everything that is new, takes time to get a hearing. Of course, in reality it is only the old brought back again, but so old that it has been forgotten. It is only those who practise and experience, that can at first understand it.” He restates his vision: “My present teaching is that the world is preparing for a new progress, a new revolution. Whatever race, whatever country seizes on the lines of that new evolution and fulfils it, will be the leader of humanity. In the *'Arya'* I state the thought upon which this new evolution will be based as I see it, and the method of Yoga by which it can be accomplished.

“The message...has three parts: (1) for each man as an individual to change himself into the future type of divine humanity, the man of the new satyayuga which is striving to be born (2) to evolve a race of such men to lead humanity and (3) to call all humanity to the path under the lead of these pioneers and this chosen race.”

The starting of the Prabartak Sangha to give a concrete form to Sri Aurobindo's conception of a commune in 1914, the issue of a Bengali fortnightly 'Prabartak' from September 1915, 'Novasangha' weekly in Bengali from November 1, the same year, the *'Standard Bearer'*, a weekly in English from August 15, 1920, the detailed guidance received by the Chandernagore group from Pondicherry, and subsequent fall off are described in detail. Even as late as March 1921 Sri Aurobindo asks A.B. Purani to see the work ('Commune, Culture and Commerce') that was being done at Chandernagore 'under my inspiration' and Purani did visit the place for the purpose. Later in 1926, Sri Aurobindo observed: “At that time I had some construction in my mind. Of course there was

something behind it which I knew to be true. Even then I was not sure that it would work out successfully. Anyway, I wanted to give it a trial and so I gave it to Motilal. He took up the idea and, as you know, he took it up with all his vital being and in an egoistic way and so the vital forces found their chance. They tried to take possession of the work. It is only after several such lessons that I had to give up the idea of rushing into work. This yoga is not a cut-out system. It is a growth by experience and one has to grow by experience.”

Letter to Dr. Munje

DESPITE SRI AUROBINDO'S repeated declaration that he had retired from political activity, attempts to draw him back into politics continued, Dr. B. S. Munje's visit in 1920 was one such effort. Munje was known to Sri Aurobindo earlier and was an influential leader of the Congress. He came along with K. B. Hedgewar (then secretary of the C. P. Provincial Congress Committee) and stayed as Sri Aurobindo's guest. He had long talks with Sri Aurobindo on the current Indian situation. Tilak who was the unquestioned leader of the Nationalists suddenly died on August 1, 1920 and other leaders felt that only Sri Aurobindo could fill his place. Munje pressed Sri Aurobindo to accept the presidency of the ensuing Nagpur session of the Congress in December 1920. But Sri Aurobindo declined and wrote an explanatory letter which is frank in its analysis of the mind of the current leadership and his own approach which was quite different. It reads:

August 30, 1920

Dear Dr. Munje,

As I have already wired to you, I find myself unable to accept your offer of the Presidency of the Nagpur Congress. There are reasons even within the political field itself which in any case would have stood in my way. In the first place I have never signed and would never care to sign a personal declaration of faith in the Congress creed, as my own is of a different character. In the next place since my retirement from British India I have developed an outlook and views which have diverged a great deal from those I held at the time and, as they are remote from present actualities and do not follow the present stream of political action, I should find myself very much embarrassed what to say to the Congress. I am entirely in sympathy with all that is being done so far as its object is to secure liberty for India, but I should be unable to identify

myself with the programme of any of the parties. The President of the congress is really a mouthpiece of the Congress and to make from the presidential chair a purely personal pronouncement miles away from what the Congress is thinking and doing would be grotesquely out of place. Not only so, but nowadays the President has a responsibility in connection with the All India Congress Committee and the policy of the Congress during the year and other emergencies that may arise which, apart from my constitutional objection and, probably, incapacity to discharge official duties of any kind or to put on any kind of harness, I should be unable to fulfil, since it is impossible for me to throw over suddenly my fixed programme and settle at once in British India. These reasons would in any case have come in the way of my accepting your offer.

The central reason, however, is this that I am no longer first and foremost a politician, but have definitely commenced another kind of work with a spiritual basis, a work of spiritual, social, cultural and economic reconstruction of an almost revolutionary kind, and am even making or at least supervising a sort of practical or laboratory experiment in that sense which needs all the attention and energy that I can have to spare. It is impossible for me to combine political work of the current kind and this at the beginning. I should practically have to leave it aside, and this I cannot do, as I have taken it up as my mission for the rest of my life. This is the true reason of my inability to respond to your call.

I may say that in any case I think you would be making a wrong choice in asking me to take Tilak's place as your head. No one now alive in India, or at least no one, yet known, is capable of taking that place, but myself least of all. I am an idealist to the marrow, and could only be useful when there is something drastic to be done, a radical or revolutionary line to be taken. (I do not mean revolutionary by violence) a movement with an ideal aim and direct method to be inspired and organized. Tilak's policy of "responsive cooperation", continued agitation and obstruction whenever needed—and that would be oftener than not in the present circumstances—is, no doubt, the only alternative to some form of non-cooperation or passive resistance. But it would need at its head a man of his combined suppleness, skill and determination to make it effective. I have not the suppleness and skill—at least of the kind needed—and could only bring the determination, supposing I accepted

the policy, which I could not do practically, as, for any reasons of my own, nothing could induce me to set my foot in the new Councils. On the other hand a gigantic movement of non-cooperation merely to get some Punjab officials punished or to set up again the Turkish Empire which is dead and gone, shocks my ideas both of proportion and of commonsense. I could only understand it as a means of “embarrassing the Government” and seizing hold of immediate grievances in order to launch an acute struggle for autonomy after the manner of Egypt and Ireland,—though no doubt without the element of violence. All the same, it could be only on a programme involving an entire change of the creed, function and organisation and policy of the Congress, making it a centre of national reconstruction and not merely of political agitation that I could—if I had not the other reason I have spoken of—re-enter the political field. Unfortunately the political mind and habits created by the past methods of the Congress do not make that practicable at the moment. I think you will see that, holding these ideas, it is not possible for me to intervene and least of all on the chair of the President.

Might I suggest that the success of the Congress can hardly depend on the presence of a single person and one who has long been in obscurity? The friends who call on me are surely wrong in thinking that the Nagpur Congress will be uninspiring without me. The national movement is surely strong enough now to be inspired with its own idea especially at a time of stress like the present. I am sorry to disappoint, but I have given the reasons that compel me and I cannot see how it is avoidable.²⁴

Yours sincerely,
Aurobindo Ghose

“What Has Happened To you!”

A SPECIAL TYPE of visitor was Amarendranath Chatterjee. He was one of those personally initiated into the revolutionary movement by Sri Aurobindo earlier. He arrived some time in 1920-21 incognito, for he was wanted by the police and had taken to the garb of the sannyasin. He had become the leader of a group of sannyasins under the assumed name of Swami Kevalananda. When he called at 41 Rue Francois Martin, complete with long matted hair, iron tongs and a staff, nobody could recognise him. He called one of the company aside and whispered something. He was immediately taken up to Sri Aurobindo with the announcement that Gabriel, had come. For ‘Gabriel’ was the code name given to him by Sri Aurobindo in the earlier days. “Good Lord!” exclaimed Sri Aurobindo. It was a happy reunion. Sri Aurobindo advised the visitor not to engage himself in revolutionary activities any more. He and his party (who had been lodged in a local choultry) left the next morning.

Sarala Devi Chowdhurani was another visitor who called during the last quarter of 1920. She desired to ascertain Sri Aurobindo’s political views and future programme. In the course of his talk Sri Aurobindo told her: “What is needed is more organisation of the national will. It is no use emotional waves rising and spreading, then going down. What we should do is to organise local committees of action throughout the country to carry out any mandate of the central organisation. These local leaders must stay among the people.

“India must want freedom because of herself, because of her own Spirit. I would very much like India to find her own Swaraj and then, like Ireland, to work out her salvation even with violence—preferably without violence. Our basis must be broader than that of mere opposition to the British Government. All the time our eyes are turned to the British and their actions. We must look to ourselves irrespectively of

them and having found our own nationhood make it free.”²⁵

Sarojini, Sri Aurobindo's sister, came in 1921. She was received at the railway station by her brother. He gave her the publication rights of his book *War and Self-Determination* to help her monetarily. It appears that when Sri Aurobindo went to see her off, he was accompanied by young Amrita who was very much moved by the affection shown to Sarojini by her brother. On return home, he seems to have told Sri Aurobindo in an emotional way, “I did not know that you had so much love in you.” The reply was immediate: “Yes and with the same love I can plunge a dagger in your chest!” Whatever the quantum of veracity in this report, one fact is certain: Sri Aurobindo's love was deep but always impersonal.

Sri Aurobindo had practised and perfected *samata*, equality, as part of his *sadhana*, and there was no field of life where it was not applied. Even when it happened that there was no salt in the curry, he would say nothing. Later if any one complained about it, he would merely remark: “Yes, today there was no salt.”

A.B. Purani paid another visit to Sri Aurobindo during this year, 1921. He makes mention of the big surprise that was in store for him this time: “During the interval of two years his body had undergone a transformation which could only be described as miraculous. In 1918 the colour of the body was like that of an ordinary Bengali—rather dark—though there was lustre on the face and his gaze was penetrating. On going upstairs to see him I found his cheeks were apple pink and the whole body glowed with a soft creamy light. So great and unexpected was the change that I could not help exclaiming, “What has happened to you!” instead of giving a direct reply, he parried the question—as I had grown a beard—*And what has happened to you?*”²⁶

Black Magic

ABOUT THE MIDDLE of December 1921 a curious incident took place which was witnessed by a number of people—a poltergeist happening. It was one of those phenomena that constantly occur and baffle the empirical mind of physical science but are easily explicable to those who have some knowledge of the occult side of life, who are aware of the fact that the physical state is not the only state of existence. There are other states, other levels of being and consciousness and there is an interchange, interaction between one plane and another. It is possible to cause things to happen on the physical plane by action on or from the subtler, occult planes.

There are many accounts of this bizarre incident that took place in the house where Sri Aurobindo and his associates lived. The Mother's recollection to the Ashram children throws more light and touches upon more details than others and we may quote her in full:

“We had a cook called Vatel. This cook was rather badtempered and didn't like being reproved about his work. Moreover, he was in contact with some Mussalmans who had, it seems, magical powers—they had a book of magic and ability to practise magic. One day, this cook had done something very bad and had been scolded, and he was furious. He had threatened us, saying, ‘You will see, you will be compelled to leave this house.’ We had taken no notice of it.

Two or three days later, I think, someone came and told me that stones had fallen in the courtyard—a few stones, three or four: bits of brick. We wondered who was throwing stones from the next house.

We did exactly what we forbid children to do: we went round on the walls and roofs to see if we could find someone or the stones or something, we found nothing.

That happened, I believe, between four and five in the afternoon. As the day declined, the number of stones increased. The next day, there were still more. They started striking the door of the kitchen specially and one of them struck Datta's (an inmate) arm as she was going to the courtyard. The number increased very much. The interest was growing. And as the interest grew, it produced a kind of effect of multiplication. And the stones began falling in several directions at the same time, in places where there were neither doors nor windows; there was a staircase, but it had no opening in those days: there was only a small bull's eye. And the stones were falling in the staircase this way (vertically); if they had come through the bull's eye, they would have come like this (sideways), but they were falling straight down. So I think they all began to become truly interested. I must tell you that this Vatel had informed us that he was ill and for the last two days (since the stones had started falling) he hadn't come. But he had left his undercook, a young boy of about thirteen or fourteen, quite fat, somewhat lifeless and a little quiet, perhaps a little stupid. And we noticed that when this boy moved around, wherever he went the stones increased. The young men who were there shut the boy up in a room, with all the doors and windows closed; they started making the experiments the spiritists make, 'Close all the doors, close all the windows.' And there was the boy sitting there inside and the stones began falling, with all the doors and windows closed! And more and more fell, and finally the boy was wounded in the leg. Then they started feeling the thing was going too far.

I was with Sri Aurobindo: quietly we were working, meditating together. The boys cast a *furtive* glance to see what was going on and began warning us, for it was perhaps time to tell us that the thing was taking pretty serious proportions. I understood immediately what the matter was.

I must tell you that we had made an attempt earlier to exhaust all possibilities of an ordinary, physical explanation. We had called in the police, informed them that there was somebody throwing stones at us, and they wanted very much to come and see what was happening. So a policeman—who was a fine good fellow—immediately told us: 'Oh! you have Vatel as your cook! Yes, yes, we know what it is!' He had a loaded pistol and stood waiting there in the courtyard—not a stone! I was on the terrace with Sri Aurobindo; I said to Sri Aurobindo: 'That's a bit too bad, we call the police and just then the stones stop falling!

But that is very annoying, in this way he will think we haven't told the truth for no stones are falling. Instantaneously the stones began falling again.

You should note that the stones were falling quite a way off from the terrace and not one of them came anywhere near us. So the policeman said: 'It is not worthwhile, my staying here. I know what it is, it is Vatel who has done this against you. I am going'.

It was after this we made the experiment of shutting up the boy, and the stones began to fall in the closed room and I was informed that the boy had been wounded. Then I said: 'All right, send the boy out of the house immediately. Send him to another house, anywhere, and let him be looked after, but don't keep him here, and that's all. Keep quiet and don't be afraid.' I was in the room with Sri Aurobindo and I thought: 'We'll see what it is.' I went into meditation and gave a little call. I said: 'Let us see, who is throwing stones at us now! You must come and tell us who is throwing stones.'

I saw three little entities of the vital, those small entities which have no strength and just enough consciousness confined to one action—it is nothing at all: but these entities are at the service of people practising magic. When people practise magic, they order them to come and they are compelled to obey. There are signs, there are words. So, they came, they were frightened—they were terribly frightened! I said: 'But why do you fling stones like that! What does it mean, this bad joke?' They replied: 'We are compelled. We are compelled...It is not our fault. We have been ordered to do it, it is not our fault.'

I really felt so much like laughing, but still I kept a serious face and told them: 'Well, you must stop this, you understand!' Then they told me: 'Don't you want to keep us? We shall do all that you ask.' 'Ah!' I thought, 'let us see, this is perhaps going to be interesting.' I said to them, 'But what can you do?' 'We know how to throw stones.'—'That doesn't interest me at all, I don't want to throw stones at anyone...But could you perchance bring me some flowers? Can you bring some roses?' Then they looked at each other in great dismay and answered: 'No, we are not made for that, we don't know how to do it.' I said: 'I don't need you, go away, and take care specially never to come back for otherwise it will be disastrous!' They ran away and never came back.

There was one thing I had noticed: it was only at the level of the roof that the stones were seen—from the roof, downwards, we saw the stones; just till the roof, above it there were no stones.

That meant it was like an automatic formation. In the air nothing could be seen: they materialised in the atmosphere of the house and fell.

And to complete the movement, the next morning (all that happened in the evening), I came down to pay a visit to the kitchen—there were pillars in the kitchen—and upon one of the pillars I found some signs with numbers as though made with a bit of charcoal, very roughly drawn, and also words in Tamil. Then I rubbed out everything carefully and made an invocation, and so it was finished, the comedy came to an end.

However, not quite. Vatel's daughter was 'ayah' in the house, the maidservant. She came early in the afternoon in a state of intense fright saying: 'My father is in the hospital he is dying; this morning something happened to him; suddenly he felt very ill and he is dying, he has been taken to the hospital, I am terribly frightened.' I knew what it was. I went to Sri Aurobindo and said to him: 'You know Vatel is in the hospital, he is dying.' Then Sri Aurobindo looked at me, he smiled; 'Oh! just for a few stones!'

That very evening Vatel was cared. But he never started anything again.'²⁷

Answering the question, how the stones could be seen, Mother explains: "That's what is remarkable. There are beings that have the power of dematerialising and rematerialising objects. These were quite ordinary pieces of bricks, but these pieces materialised only in the field where the magic acted. The magic was practised for this house, specially for its courtyard, and the action of vital forces worked only there. That is why when I sent away the boy and he went to another house, not a single stone hit him any more. The magical formation was made specially for this house and the stones materialised in the courtyard. And as it was something specially directed against Datta, she was hit on her arm. There was yet something else. We came to know later to which magician Vatel had gone. He had gone to a magician who, it seems, is very well known here and had said that he wanted definitely to make us leave

that house—I don't know why. He was furious. And so he asked the magician to make stones fall there. The magician told him: 'But that's the house Sri Aurobindo lives in!' He said: 'Yes.'—'Ah, no, I am not going to meddle in this business: you manage it, I am not getting involved.' Then Vatel insisted very much; he even promised him a greater reward, a little more money. The magician said: 'Well, look here; we are going to make a rule. In a circle of twenty-five metres around Sri Aurobindo the stones will not fall. Always there will have to be twenty-five metres' distance between the stones and Sri Aurobindo.' And that was why never did a single stone come anywhere near us, never. They fell at the other end of the coutryard."

Letter to C. R. Das

THE NON-COOPERATION Movement launched in 1921 under the leadership of Gandhiji having failed to achieve its objective, there was a move among some prominent leaders like Motilal Nehru, C. R. Das and others to give a new direction to the Congress activity. Das desired Sri Aurobindo to take up the leadership of the Congress. Sri Aurobindo again declined. A letter written by Sri Aurobindo at this time is interesting.

Arya Office Pondicherry,
November, 18, 1922

Dear Chitta,

It is a long time, almost two years I think, since I have written a letter to anyone. I have been so much retired and absorbed in my Sadhana that contact with the outside world has till lately been reduced to minimum. Now that I am looking outward again, I find that circumstances lead me to write first to you—I say, circumstances' because it is a need that makes me take up the pen after so long a disuse.

The need is in connection with the first outward work that I am undertaking after this long inner retirement. Barin has gone to Bengal and will see you in connection with it, but a word from me is perhaps necessary and therefore I send you through Barin this letter. I am giving also a letter of authority from which you will understand the immediate nature of the need for which I have sent him to raise funds. But I may add something to make it more definite.

I think you know my present idea and the attitude towards life and work to which it has brought me. I have become confirmed in a preception which I had always, less clearly and dynamically then, but which has now become more and more evident to me, that the true basis of work and life is the spiritual—that is to say, a new consciousness

to be developed only by Yoga. I see more and more manifestly that man can never get out of the futile circle, the race is always treading until he has raised himself on to the new foundation. I believe also that it is the mission of India to make this great victory for the world. But what precisely was the nature of the dynamic power of this greater consciousness? What was the condition of its effective truth? How could it be brought down, mobilised, organised, turned upon life? How could our present instruments, intellect, mind, life, body be made true and perfect channels for this great transformation? This was the problem I have been trying to work out in my own experience and I have now a sure basis, a wide knowledge and some mastery of the secret. Not yet its fulness and complete imperative presence—therefore I have still to remain in retirement. For I am determined not to work in the external field till I have the sure and complete possession of this new power of action—not to build except on a perfect foundation.

But still I have gone far enough to be able to undertake one work on a larger scale than before—the training of others to receive this Sadhana and prepare themselves as I have done, for without that my future work cannot even be begun. There are many who desire to come here and whom I can admit for the purpose, there are a greater number who can be trained at a distance; but I am unable to carry on unless I have sufficient funds to be able to maintain a centre here and one or two at least outside. I need therefore much larger resources than I at present command. I have thought that by your recommendation and influence you may help Barin to gather them for me. May I hope that you will do this for me?

One word to avoid a possible misunderstanding. Long ago I gave to Motilal Roy of Chandernagore the ideas and some principles and lines of a new social and economical organisation and education and this with my spiritual force behind him he has been trying to work out in his own way in his Sangha. This is quite a separate thing from what I am now writing about—my own work which I must do myself and no one can do for me.

I have been following with interest your political activities. specially your present attempt to give a more flexible and practically effective

turn to the non-cooperation movement. I doubt whether you will succeed against such contrary forces, but I wish you success in your endeavour. I am most interested however in your indications about Swaraj; for I have been developing my own ideas about the organisation of a true Indian Swaraj and I shall look forward to see how far yours will fall in with mine.

Yours,
Aurobindo²⁸

9 Rue de la Marine

SRI AUROBINDO CHANGED his lodgings in September 1922 when he moved to 9 Rue de la Marine. In due course more buildings, that were adjacent were acquired and a complex of constructions developed into what are today known as the central buildings of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. Sri Aurobindo never moved out of this places.

It was after Sri Aurobindo left the old residence in Rue Francois Martin, that it came to be called 'Guest House', a name it still bears.

The evening session of talks and meditations that had started earlier in 41 Rue Fracois Martin continued in the new premises. A. B. Purani who joined in the beginning of 1923 has done a yeoman service in keeping a record—to the best of his ability—of these talks which continued till December 1926. The talks are far ranging and they have been issued in two series under the title Evening Talks. (The third series relates to period after November 1938). Yoga, Religion, Art, Literature, Veda, Science, History, Politics, World affairs—no subject was taboo—all form subjects of the talks with everybody present participating without any reserve.

C. R. Das, who was on his South Indian tour, visited Sri Aurobindo on June 5, 1923 and no doubt discussed the political situation with special reference to the role of the Swarajya Party founded by him and like minded leaders in opposition to the 'No-changers' who were in control of the Congress organisation. He seems to have asked Sri Aurobindo to accept him as a disciple, but he was dissuaded in view of his involvement in politics and the poor state of his health.

Sri T. V. Kapali Sastry, who had met Sri Aurobindo in 1917 as mentioned earlier, had another meeting with him in July 1923. Ever since he took leave of Sri Aurobindo on the earlier occasion, a series of developments took place in his inner life: the most notable of them

being a regular experience in sleep of being bodily lifted up and brought down into a room which he later recognised when he met Sri Aurobindo in 1923 at his new residence.

He has described how struck he was by the spectacular change in the complexion of Sri Aurobindo's body; from dark brown it had changed to golden hue. Sri Aurobindo smiled when Sastry remarked upon it. In the course of the talk in which there was mention of the truth of the Supramental, Sri Aurobindo told him that only two could give that to him: The Mahashakti or—he pointed to himself. While parting Sastry asked: "Can I know that the help I would receive is yours?" "Yes", replied Sri Aurobindo and immediately there started the downpour of a consciousness which continued thereafter.

This meeting decided the future course of Sastry's life. He freed himself from his commitments, secular and spiritual, and settled in the Ashram a few years later. He engaged himself in intense sadhana and was responsible for many others—including the present writer—turning to Sri Aurobindo. Of his written works, his commentary on the Rig Veda (Siddhanjana) is the most famous. He translated some of the works of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother into Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit and wrote original treatises on the Veda, Upanishads, Tantra, Mantra, Yoga. His writings form the indispensable bridge between the past spiritual heritage of India and the Darshana of Sri Aurobindo.

G. V. Subbarao, a leader from Andhra, met Sri Aurobindo in October 1923 and his recollections are interesting. He gives a fine pen sketch of Sri Aurobindo: "Sri Aurobindo was dazzling bright in colour—it was said that, in his earlier years, he was more dark than brown and had a long, rather thin beard which was well dressed with streaks of white strewn here and there. The figure was slender and not much taller than Gandhiji's but a bit more fleshy. The eyes were big and elongated to a point and their looks were keen and piercing like shells. He was dressed in fine cotton, not khaddar evidently. He had only two clothes on, one a dhoti and the other an upper cloth worn in the traditional fashion of an *upaveetam* i.e. right arm and shoulder exposed. The lower part of the legs was slender, feminine and the feet were hidden in two small slippers.

His voice was low, but quite audible, quick and musical. He was fast in his flow of speech, clear like a crystal and analytical to a degree. In a fifteen-minute talk, he gave me his philosophy in a nutshell. He was simple and courteous, outspoken and free in his interrogations. It seemed as though he could know a man by the sweep of his eyes, and read men's minds from a survey of their photographs. He appeared as one highly cognisant of the value of time. He was kind throughout, as to a child, but I could discern enough in his demeanour to conclude that he could be stern and imperious when required. Sri Aurobindo had long been absorbed in a *Sadhana* for *yoga siddhi*, which, he believed, was destined to form a new order of life in the world. He had always seen it, though less clearly and dynamically at first, that a higher spiritual power was necessary to solve the moral, material, social and even political problems of the world. Just as Gandhiji believed in an inner, moral power or soul-force as essential for the redemption of the world, similarly Sri Aurobindo believed that a higher spiritual power was absolutely necessary and must be brought down on earth to help the regeneration of the world."

He makes an observation that is significant in view of later developments: "Speaking about some visions, he says that these things are of common occurrence. 'Mirra had them a hundred times.' This Mirra seems to be an extraordinary lady; and even in 1923, she was said to be the best of disciples and was consulted by Sri Aurobindo on many affairs, including yoga. No wonder, therefore, that she has been for a long time the acknowledged *Mother* of the *Ashram*."

Dilip Kumar Roy–Devdas Gandhi

AMONG THE NOTABLE interviews in the year 1924 was the one given to Dilip Kumar Roy on the 24th January. Son of the famous Bengali poet Dwijendralal Roy, Dilip was himself a musician and poet of promise. He had been attracted to Sri Aurobindo by his writings and had sought this meeting. He met him on two successive days and has given an account in his book. *Among the Great*. He describes the scene: “A radiant personality! sang the very air about him. A deep aura of peace encircled him, an ineffable yet concrete peace that drew you almost at once into its magic orbit. But it was the eyes that fascinated me most—shining like beacons.”

He refers to having read the *Yogic Sadhan*. Sri Aurobindo hastens to tell him: “I am not the author of the book *Yogic Sadhan*. I merely held the pen while a disembodied being wrote off what he wished, using my pen and hand.” Sri Aurobindo speaks reminiscently: “I too wanted at one time to transform through my yoga the face of the world. My aim was to change the fundamental nature and movements of humanity, to exile all the evils which afflict helpless mortality. It was with this aspiration that I turned to yoga in the beginning and I came to Pondicherry because I had been directed by the Voice to pursue my yoga here. I told Lele when agreeing to follow his instructions that I would do his yoga only on condition that it didn’t interfere with my poetry and service to the country. Lele agreed and gave me initiation. But soon afterwards he left, bidding me turn solely to my inner guidance. Since then I have followed only this inner Voice which has led me to develop what I named the Integral Yoga, It was then that my outlook changed with the knowledge born of my new yogic consciousness. But then I found, to my utter disillusionment, that it was only my ignorance which had led me to believe that the impossible was feasible here and now. Because I didn’t realise then that in order to help humanity out it

was not enough for an individual, however great, to achieve an ultimate solution individually: humanity has to be ripe for it too. For the crux of the difficulty is that even when the Light is ready to descend it cannot come to stay until the lower plane is also ready to bear the pressure of the Descent.”

Some time during this period Gandhiji sent his son Devdas to meet Sri Aurobindo and know his mind on matters of common concern. The interview does not seem to have clicked from the visitor’s point of view. When he asked Sri Aurobindo about his views on non-violence, the latter put a counter-question: “Suppose there is an invasion of India by the Afghans, how are you going to meet it with non-violence?”

It appears Devdas asked—not in very good taste—why Sri Aurobindo was “attached to smoking”; he got it back: “why are you attached to non-smoking.”

Lajpat Rai–Tandon

LALA LAJPAT RAI met Sri Aurobindo on January 5, 1925. They spent forty-five minutes together; later they were joined by Purushottamdas Tandon and others. The current political conditions and deterioration in the public character formed the main themes. Sri Aurobindo told them: “The lust for power will always be there. You can’t get over it by shutting out all positions of power; our workers must get accustomed to it. They must learn to hold the positions for the nation. This difficulty would be infinitely greater when you get *Swaraj*. These things are there even in Europe. The Europeans are just the same as we are. Only, they have got discipline—which we lack—and a keen sense of national honour which we have not got. You can’t prevent such weaknesses. What you have to do is to bring about that discipline and that sense of national honour in our people.”

C. R. Das passed away on June 20, 1925. Sri Aurobindo sent a message at the request of *The Bombay Chronicle*.

“Chittaranjan’s death is a supreme loss. Consummately endowed with political intelligence, constructive imagination, magnetism, a driving force combining a strong will and an uncommon plasticity of mind for vision and tact of the hour, he was the one after Tilak who could have led India to Swaraj.”

On the 15th August 1925, his birthday, Sri Aurobindo makes some important statements. Among them are: “I am not doing an isolated yoga. When I wrote that much abused sentence about humanity in *The Yoga and Its Objects*, there was a truth behind it though I was not conscious of it. It is true that my yoga is not for humanity; but it is not for myself either; of course, my attaining to the *Sidhi* is the preliminary condition to others being able to attain it. If I were seeking my own liberation and perfection, my yoga would have been finished long ago.”

Asked how the universal conditions were more ready then than before for the coming down of the Supramental Truth, he says:

“Firstly, the knowledge of the physical world has increased so much that it is on the verge of breaking its own bounds.

Secondly, there is an attempt all over the world towards breaking the veil between the outer and the inner mental, the outer and the inner vital and even the outer and the inner physical. Men are becoming more ‘psychic’.

Thirdly, the vital is trying to lay its hold on the physical as it never did before. It is always the sign that whenever the higher Truth is coming down, it throws up the hostile vital world on the surface, and you see all sorts of abnormal vital manifestations, such as increase in the number of persons who go mad, earthquakes etc. Also, the the world is becoming more united on account of discoveries, of modern science—the aeroplane, the railways, the wireless, telegraph etc. Such a union is the condition for the highest Truth coming down and it is also our difficulty.

Fourthly, the rise of persons who wield tremendous vital influence over large numbers of men.”²⁹

On November 19, 1925 he makes a few interesting remarks about his biography. “To write my biography is impossible. The idea is quite wrong. Who could write it? Not only in my case but in that of poets, philosophers and yogis it is no use attempting a biography, because they do not live in their external life. Their real life is inner and how can anyone else know that life? It is different with men of action like Napoleon or Julius Caesar, men who develop themselves through action, but even in their cases it would be best if they wrote their biographies themselves.”

Since, however, Sri Aurobindo never wrote his own biography, there have been attempts by others in that direction and Sri Aurobindo was always indulgent enough to go through their efforts and correct or modify things that were inaccurate or misleading. Dr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar’s biography—first published in 1945—was perhaps the first that he perused and corrected at length.

24th November, 1926

EVEN IN 1926 Sri Aurobindo was not certain of his plans for external work. For he says, in a talk on May 18, 1926: “I myself am not sure as to the form my work should take though I have some ideas within me. I am constitutionally an anarchist and a communist and try to form plans according to my bent and this has become an obstacle to the real Truth-Force organising its work. So I keep these in check. There may be forms and moulds prepared in the mind for application if proper conditions are forthcoming, but these are never to be taken as final. I have not got the whole plan. I am perfecting my ideas within and people misunderstand me saying that I am doing nothing. I do not mind at all what the outside world says of me. I have my own work to do, and I am doing that.”

In an unusual recollection, Sri Aurobindo notes (on July 10, 1926): “In the course of yogic evolution, I came to know some of my past lives. The elements of character I had in those previous personalities are still working in this life. My capacities and incapacities come from those personalities. My active work in the political field and my yogic work came from different personalities of my own in the past. There are other elements in my character which have not been derived by association with other personalities.”³⁰

The 24th November, 1926 is an important milestone in Sri Aurobindo’s life. In his inner life it marks the culmination of a long movement of successive ascents of consciousness in its assumption by the Cosmic, Overmind Consciousness which descended into his being; in his outer life it marks his total withdrawal from even the semi-public life he was leading.

The realisation that established itself at this juncture was of the Delight Consciousness of Lord Krishna. Aurobindo explains:

“24th was the descent of Krishna into the physical. Krishna is not the Supramental Light. The descent of Krishna would mean the decent of the Overmind Godhead preparing, though not itself actually bringing, the descent of Supermind and Ananda. Krishna is the Anandamaya; he supports the evolution through the Overmind leading it towards his Ananda.”³¹

The way was opened for a thrust beyond the Overmind—the Golden Lid of the Upanishad—into the domains of the Truth-Consciousness, the Supermind. And to devote himself exclusively to this task of realising the Supramental Consciousness for the earth, Sri Aurobindo announced his complete retirement. He declared Mirra as the Mother in his Yoga and entrusted all his disciples to her care. Thenceforth all dealings with him were to be through her.

November 24, 1926 may also be regarded as the day of the founding of Sri Aurobindo Ashram. For the Mother was placed in charge of the community of *sadhaks* (about twenty-five of them) that had been growing steadily around Sri Aurobindo, and this spiritual collectivity was to be the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. It appears Sri Aurobindo was not happy with the term *ashram* for the community in view of its agelong association with asceticism and monasticism; he considered for three days and ultimately decided to use the name ashram in the older Vedic sense of being the house of the Teacher where seekers are received for imparting knowledge and training for life.

Indeed, the change was not sudden at all. Ever since Mirra was called and installed in Sri Aurobindo’s house, she had begun to look after his needs and the general arrangements in the house, more and more. This took definite shape by the beginning of the year and the 24th of November was a natural culmination.

Her emergence as the Mother was also nothing sudden. More and more devotees and disciples had begun to seek her out. Sri Aurobindo had been referring to her many cases needing occult help. He, in fact, was in so many ways encouraging those around him to regard Mirra as a spiritual Mother.

And Sri Aurobindo himself had been showing increasing reluctance to come out and mix as before. The evening sessions had been getting later and later even passing into midnight. He took the occasion of the 24th to take a step that was already preparing.

The Ashram had already been born; it had remained only to christen it. As stated in *Sri Aurobindo and his Ashram*: "Sri Aurobindo lived at first in retirement at Pondicherry with four or five companions. Afterwards more and yet more began to come to him to follow his spiritual path and the number became so large that a community of *sadhaks* had to be formed for the maintenance and collective guidance of those who had left every thing behind for the sake of a higher life. This was the foundation of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram which has less been created than grown around him as its centre.

"It may be pointed out in this connection that *Sannyas* was never accepted by Sri Aurobindo as part of his yoga. His Ashram at Pondicherry is a glaring contradiction to this popular idea of *Sannyas* connected with the name of an Ashram. Members of this Ashram are not, *Sannyasis*, they do not wear the ochre garb or practise complete asceticism but are *sadhaks* of a life based on spiritual realisation, the ideal being the attainment of the life divine here on this earth and in the earthly existence". Again, "The Ashram is not a religious association. Those who are here come from all religions and some are of no religion. There is no creed or set of dogmas, no governing religious body; there are only the teachings of Sri Aurobindo and certain psychological practices of concentration and meditation etc. for the enlarging of the consciousness receptivity to the Truth, mastery over the desires, the discovery of the divine Self and Consciousness concealed within each human being, a higher evolution of the nature."

The Teaching

He defines the Teaching that is to be followed in the Ashram:³²

The teaching of Sri Aurobindo starts from that of the ancient sages of India that behind the appearances of the universe there is the Reality of a Being and Consciousness, a Self of all things, one and eternal. All beings are united in that One Self and Spirit but divided by a certain separativity of consciousness, an ignorance of their true Self and Reality in the mind, life and body. It is possible by a certain psychological discipline to remove this veil of separative consciousness and become aware of the true Self, the Divinity within us and all.

Sri Aurobindo's teaching states that this One Being and Consciousness is involved here in Matter. Evolution is the method by

which it liberates itself; consciousness appears in what seems to be inconscient and once having appeared is self-impelled to grow higher and higher and at the same time to enlarge and develop towards a greater and greater perfection. Life is the first step of this release of consciousness; mind is the second; but the evolution does not finish with mind, it awaits a release into something greater, a consciousness which is spiritual and supramental. The next step of the evolution must be towards the development of Supermind and Spirit as the dominant power in the conscious being. For only then will the involved Divinity in things release itself entirely and it become possible for life to manifest perfection.

But while the former steps in evolution were taken by Nature without a conscious will in the plant and animal life, in man Nature becomes able to evolve by a conscious will in the instrument. It is not, however, by the mental will in the man that this can be wholly done, for the mind goes only to a certain point and after that can only move in a circle. A conversion has to be made, a turning of the consciousness by which mind has to change into the higher principle. This method is to be found through the ancient psychological discipline and practice of Yoga. In the past, it has been attempted by a drawing away from the world and a disappearance into the height of the Self or Spirit. Sri Aurobindo teaches that a descent of the higher principle is possible which will not merely release the spiritual Self out of the world, but release it in the world, replace the mind's ignorance or its very limited knowledge by a supramental Truth-Consciousness which will be a sufficient instrument of the inner Self and make it possible for the human being to find himself dynamically as well as inwardly and grow out of his still animal humanity into a diviner race. The psychological discipline of Yoga can be used to that end by opening all the parts of the being to a conversion or transformation through the descent and working of the higher still concealed supramental principle.

This, however, cannot be done at once or in a short time or by any rapid or miraculous transformation. Many steps have to be taken by the seeker before the supramental descent is possible. Man lives mostly in his surface mind, life and body, but there is an inner being within him with greater possibilities to which he has to awake—for it is only a very restricted influence from it that he receives now and that pushes him to constant pursuit of a greater beauty, harmony, power and knowledge.

The first process of Yoga is therefore to open the ranges of this inner being to live from there outward governing his outward life by an inner light and force. In doing so he discovers in himself his true soul which is not this outer mixture of mental, vital and physical elements but something of the Reality behind them, a spark from the one Divine Fire. He has to learn to live in his soul and purify and orientate by its drive towards the Truth the rest of the nature. There can follow afterwards an opening upward and descent of a higher principle of the Being. But even then it is not at once the full supramental Light and Force. For there are several ranges of consciousness between the ordinary human mind and the supramental Truth-Consciousness. These intervening ranges have to be opened up and their power brought down into the mind, life and body Only afterwards can the full power of the Truth-Consciousness work in the nature. The process of this self-discipline or sadhana is therefore long and difficult, but even a little of it is so much gained because it makes the ultimate release and perfection more possible.

There are many things belonging to older systems that are necessary on the way—an opening of the mind to a greater wideness and to the sense of the Self and the Infinite, an emergence into what has been called the cosmic consciousness, mastery over the desires and passions; an outward asceticism is not essential, but the conquest of desire and a control over the body and its needs, greeds and instincts are indispensable. There is a combination of the principles of the old systems. The way of knowledge through the mind's discernment between Reality and the appearance, the heart's way of devotion, love and surrender and the way of works turning the will away from motives of self interest to the Truth and the service of a greater Reality than the ego. For the whole being has to be trained so that it can respond and be transformed when it is possible for that greater Light and Force to work in the nature.

In this discipline the inspiration of the Master and, in the difficult stages, his control and his presence are indispensable—for it would be impossible otherwise to go through it without much stumbling and error which would prevent all chance of success. The Master is one who has risen to a higher consciousness and being and he is often regarded as its manifestation or representative. He not only helps by his teaching and still more by his influence and example but by a power to communicate his own experience to others.

This is Sri Aurobindo's teaching and method of practice. It is not his object to develop any one religion or to amalgamate the older religions or to found any new religion—for any of these things would lead away from his central purpose. The one aim of his Yoga is an inner self-development by which each one who follows it can in time discover the One Self in all and evolve a higher consciousness than the mental, a spiritual and supramental consciousness which will transform and divinise human nature.

The Mother

SRI AUROBINDO'S WITHDRAWAL from the daily life of the community was certainly not expected by the members. But what was more difficult to accept at any rate for many—was that the Mother was to be the guide and effective head of the ashram. All had, indeed, deep regard for her, her capacities—organisational and occult-spiritual—but it was quite another thing to be asked to entrust themselves to her materially and spiritually. They could have access to Sri Aurobindo only through her. Some adjusted themselves to the new situation, a few could not and left in due course, and a few others emboldened themselves to ask 'Why?' Why should they accept this 'foreign' lady as the mother? These questions—asked and unasked—reached Sri Aurobindo who then chose to answer. His reply, given in one stretch of writing, is a classic in the English language on the Divine Mother Principle. Entitled "The Four Powers of the Mother", it forms the main body of the little book, *The Mother*, (Published in 1928) which has been recognised as the key to the Yoga of Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo explains how there is a great Divine Puissance, Shakti, working in the Universe for the manifestation of the Divine. This Power streams into four main channels: the Power of Knowledge, the Power of Strength, the Power of Harmony and Beauty, the Power of Work and Service. These Four are known and worshipped as Maheshwari, Mahakali, Mahalakshmi, Mahasaraswati. Each has her own part in the Cosmic Manifestation; other powers, deities, are emanations of these. Together they work to build the individual and the universe in the figure of the Divine Being in its fourfold manifestation. All these Divine Powers were, he explained, manifesting in the person of the Mother who had been missioned to lay the foundations of a New Creation.

This categorical declaration, on Sri Aurobindo's part, set the seal on the arrangements and things soon fell into the required pattern. Of

course, his presence and guidance were always there—but in a different way. The Mother took up the burden of the daily life with its manifold responsibilities and he was, to that extent, freed to concentrate on the inner work that was claiming more and more of his attention.

Sri Aurobindo and the Mother shifted on February 8, 1929, to another building closeby on Rue Francois Martin and it is there that they lived for the rest of their lives. This building is known as the Meditation House and the other one as the Library House as a library was opened there on the ground floor after Sri Aurobindo moved out.

The ashram grew into a large family, with more and more seekers arriving from different parts of the country, distant lands on the globe, to participate and grow in this new mode of living, with the motto *All life is Yoga*. Every field of interest, every sphere of constructive life, was sought to be embraced in the spirit of God and turned into a means for individual and collective evolution of consciousness. The broad lines of sadhana were laid down: Knowledge, Love, Work. The means were taught: deepening of consciousness, enlargement of range and vision, transcendence of ego, desire and the limitation thereof. Each was helped to a harmony of the faculties of mind, will, heart and life-body, with a view to developing into a channel for the manifestation of the Divine Consciousness. It was a positive endeavour, world-affirming, but with a different orientation—to realise the Kingdom of God on Earth.

The practitioners wrote to Sri Aurobindo and the Mother of their experience, their difficulties, in this Path of aspiration, rejection and surrender. Sri Aurobindo would answer them in detail, whatever the nature of the queries—elementary or philosophical—and a time came when besides attending to the reports of the various sections of ashram work, he had to spend hours together (all the night and a good part of the day) answering letters. Thus there was a constant touch between the Master and the disciples. He and the Mother would receive them on three occasion in a year: February 21, the Mother's birthday; August 15 Sri Aurobindo's birthday; November 24, the Siddhi day as it came to be known later. From 1939 onwards, April 24, the day of the Mother's final arrival, was included. These were the days of Darshan, when they gave silent blessings to each one present; apart from the inmates of the ashram there were always people from outside who had been specially permitted to attend.

The Mother made herself available to all who sought her help and guided the general activity of the ashram. The spirit behind the whole effort may be appreciated on mention of an incident in the early days of the ashram. A number of sections were started rather started by themselves—for looking after the essentials of the collective life, food, water, electricity, sanitation etc. It was proposed to name them as departments. On coming to know of it, Sri Aurobindo suggested a change: services instead of departments. That is the origin of the various services that one finds in the ashram today.

Sri Aurobindo once said, “The ashram is the Mother’s creation and would not have existed but for her.” She represents the dynamic, the manifestation side of his Teaching. It is she who has given practical shape to his philosophy of *Life Divine*. He has also gone on record as saying that she is the only person from whom he received real spiritual help. At a certain stage when he had not the know-how of reaching help to others, she came and gave the needed help in that direction. He did not treat her as his disciple but always as a complementary side of the same Consciousness as his. The Mother regarded him as her mainstay. She said; “*Without him I exist not.*” The two together, in their ordained collaboration, have initiated a Movement of Reclamation of the Earth. Posterity will participate in the gathering of the rich fruits of this life-long endeavour. We are too close.

Hearken to me

POET RABINDRANATH TAGORE visited Sri Aurobindo on May 29, 1928. It was a memorable meeting after which he wrote: “At the very first sight I could realise that he had been seeking for the soul and had gained it, and through this long process of realisation had accumulated within him a silent power of inspiration. His face was radiant with an inner light and his serene presence made it evident to me that his soul was not crippled and cramped to the measure of some tyrannical doctrine which takes delight in inflicting wounds upon life...I felt that the utterance of the ancient Hindu Rishi spoke from him of that equanimity which gives the human soul its freedom of entrance into the All. I said to him ‘You have the Word and we are waiting to accept it from you. India will speak through your voice to the world, ‘Hearken to me’.

Years ago I saw Aurobindo in the atmosphere of his earlier heroic youth and I sang to him.

Aurobindo, accept the salutation from Rabindranath. Today I saw him in a deeper atmosphere of a reticent richness of wisdom and again sang to him in silence.

Aurobindo, accept the salutation from Rabindranath.”

In the ashram, the number of inmates kept on increasing; from 25 in 1926, it became 36 in 1927, 80 in 1928. And though Sri Aurobindo was concentrated on his objective of invoking the *Supramental* or the *Truth-Consciousness* to descend in the Earth-Being so as to form a permanent operating Power in humanity, he made time for attending to the work of the ashram—corresponding with the inmates and the growing number of aspirants and seekers from outside. Selections from these letters on yoga philosophy and practice were issued from time to time in book-form viz. *The Riddle of this World* (1933), *Light on Yoga* (1935), *Bases of Yoga* (1936). He also wrote new poetry, notably, sonnets and

other poems with autobiographical overtones. His *Six Poems* was published in 1934, poems (1941). The other poems were brought out as posthumous publications: *Last poems* (1952), *More Poems* (1957).

It was in 1935 that Maurice Magre, the well-known French poet and thinker, arrived in Pondicherry and stayed for a while familiarising himself with Sri Aurobindo's yoga. He was to write later in his book, *A la Poursuite de la Sagesse*: "Suffice it for us that there should be one who occupies all space extending from the North pole to the South. He does not declare his royalty. His face is so pure that one can see his soul through it."

There came, however, a rude interruption in this even course of events. At about 2 a.m. on November 24, 1938, the morning of the Darshan scheduled for that day, Sri Aurobindo had a fall and his right leg got fractured. It was a totally unexpected crisis in the life of the ashram and hundreds who had gathered for Darshan were disappointed. As for Sri Aurobindo himself, he was taken unawares. But he did not call anyone. He just lay there, where he had stumbled against the head of a tiger-skin, till the Mother in her room received an inner intimation and arrived on the spot.

Sri Aurobindo explained later that he was, at that hour, all concentrated on the Mother's safety and was not mindful of himself. However, he seems to have always provided for the possibility of an accident. For in reply to a question on the possibility of death in his case, he had said (15-8-24): "There are three things that can bring it about: 1. Violent surprise and accident. 2. Action of age. 3. My own choice, finding it not possible to do it this time, or by something shown to me which would prove it is not possible this time."

This unfortunate turn marks the end of a brilliant period in the history of the *ashram* and the beginning of a new one in Sri Aurobindo's life. Thereafter a few attendants would be always present in his chamber and informal conversations took place whenever he was disposed that way. A. B. Purani has recorded some of them in the Third Series of his Evening Talks (December 1938–October 1943). Nirodbaran has also recorded them and they have been published in three series of his *Talks with Sri Aurobindo*. His book *Twelve Years with Sri Aurobindo*, gives a beautiful, graphic and lively account of Sri Aurobindo's life from 1938

to 1950 and will always rank among the best in this type of literature in the English language.

As one would expect, Sri Aurobindo went through the ordeal with his customary equanimity and utilised his enforced immobility for revising some of his major writings in the *Arya*, like *The Life Divine*. It was in this period that most of his revisions were done, including the Hymns to Agni (in the Rig Veda). He showed his enormous strength of will in resuming his 'walks'; he would pace up and down—a distance which was found to be approximately seven miles per day.

He experimented with Quantitative Metre in English. Some of the results are appended to the *Collected Poems* and *Plays* published on the occasion of his 70th birth anniversary—1942.

World War II

THE POWER OF Yoga to produce effects in the material world by an unseen action of will is well known in the spiritual and occult tradition of India. In the course of a letter in the early years in Pondicherry, defining his immediate objectives in yoga, Sri Aurobindo speaks of “determining of events, activities and results of action throughout the world by pure silent will-power”. In fact his first approach to Yoga itself was to secure power to execute his revolutionary programme for liberating India. Obviously he achieved substantial success in the matter. In a talk on 9-12-1925, he confesses that he “worked for the success of the Russian Revolution for three years. I was one of the influences that worked to make it a success. I also worked for Turkey.” Speaking on August 21, 1926, he observes: “At first I was not very successful, very often it seemed to produce no result at all and I found that the work was done afterwards in quite another way than that I had expected or insisted. The same result came but it arrived in another way.”³³

On another occasion, December 14, 1938, he remarks: “...while I have tried to work on the world the results have been varied. In Spain—in Madrid—I was splendidly successful. Gen. Miaja was an admirable instrument to work on. Basque was an utter failure. Negus was a good instrument but the people around him, though good warriors, were too ill-organised and ill-equipped. The work in Egypt was not a success. In Ireland and Turkey the success was tremendous. In Ireland, I have done exactly what I wanted to do in Bengal.”³⁴

Still later (October 1932), he writes: “I have never known any will of mine for any major event in the conduct of the world-affairs to fail in the end, although it may take a long time for the world-forces to fulfil it.”

With this background it is easy to understand his preoccupation with the developments in World War-II when it broke out in 1939. He at

once perceived that the Axis Powers represented by Hitler, Mussolini and Japan were a great threat to the present human civilisation. He did not condone the failings of the Allies i.e. the British and the French. But he felt and felt strongly that the new imperialisms of Germany and Japan were younger and more dangerous than the decaying older imperialisms of the British and the French. He saw that the doors for the progress of humanity could be kept open only if the Axis Powers were defeated. He took an unequivocal stand in support of the Allies, despite his life long opposition to the British Power, and publicly offered his support to the Allied War Effort through a token contribution to their War Fund. In his letter covering the contribution he stated:

“We feel that not only is this a battle waged in just self-defence and in defence of the nations threatened with the world-domination of Germany and the Nazi system of life, but that it is a defence of civilisation and its highest attained social, cultural and spiritual values and of the the whole future of humanity. To this cause our support and sympathy will be unswerving whatever may happen: we look forward to the victory of Britain and, as the eventual result, an era of peace and union among the nations and a better and more secure world-order.” The letter was written (September 19, 1940) at the time of the collapse of France and the threatened collapse of Britain.

He analysed the position in greater detail at a later date: “What we say is not that the Allies have not done wrong things, but that they stand on the side of the evolutionary forces...

“The Divine takes men as they are and uses men as His instruments even if they are not flawless in virtue, angelic, holy and pure. If they are of good will, if, to use the Biblical phrase, they are on the Lord’s side, that is enough for the work to be done. Even if I knew that the Allies would misuse their victory or bungle the peace or partially at least spoil the opportunities opened to the human world by that victory, I would still put my force behind them. At any rate things could not be one-hundredth part as bad as they would be under Hitler. The ways of the Lord would still be open—to keep them open is what matters. Let us stick to the real, the central fact, the need to remove the peril of black servitude and revived barbarism threatening India and the world.”³⁵

He followed the developments of the war, day by day, night after

night, and exerted himself in his own way through all the crisis, all military disasters like Dunkirk, and had the satisfaction of seeing the black danger to humanity averted.

In a poem, *The Children of Wotan*, written in August 1940, he portrays the danger that was looming ahead:

“Our leader is master of Fate, medium of her mysteries.

We have made the mind a cypher, we have strangled Thought with
a cord;

Dead now are pity and honour, strength only is Nature’s lord.

We build a new world-order,

We are the human Titans, the supermen dreamed by the sage.

A cross of the beast and demoniac with the godhead of power and
will,

We are born in humanity’s sunset, to the Night is our pilgrimage.

On the bodies of perishing nations, mid the cry of the cataclysm
coming,

To the presto of bomb and shell and the aeroplanes’ fatal humming,

We march, lit by Truth’s death-pyre, to the world’s satanic age.”

Sri Aurobindo was much misunderstood for this action of his in supporting the Allies, though a few of the far-sighted leaders saw the wisdom of it.

Cripps Mission

ALL THE WHILE Sri Aurobindo was following the political and other developments in the country with special attention. He had certain differences with Mahatma Gandhi on some of the major planks of his programme e.g. non-violence as a political creed, Charkha economics, approach to the communal-problem. But he saw in Gandhiji the chosen leader to carry the freedom movement forward. And by 1939 he was in a position to send word to Gandhiji with a positive note. This message was sent through the Bengal Provincial Congress leader, Surendra Mohan Ghose who was one of the earliest members of the revolutionary groups in the anti-partition agitation and had spent as many as twenty-three years in jail. Ghose started coming to the ashram regularly from 1939 and became a kind of liaison between Sri Aurobindo and the Congress leaders.

Surendra Mohan recalls: “Once Gandhi had wanted to see him, but Sri Aurobindo had avoided the meeting—but in 1939 he said ‘He can come now; whatever political difference there was is no more. He can see me. You may convey this to him’. I went to Sevagram and told Gandhi. He also wanted to convince me that there was no difference. For three days I stayed with him. He said, ‘Yes I want to go, you make some arrangement.’ ” But Ghose had committed himself to offer *satyagraha* on a near date, he was jailed and the meeting never came off.

Sri Aurobindo had appreciated the work of the Congress Ministries after taking office in 1937. He spoke highly of Jawaharlal Nehru long before he came to power. In the course of a letter to Dilip Kumar Roy, he comments: ‘...he bears on himself the stamp of a very fine character,

a nature of the highest sattwic kind, full of rectitude and high sense of honour, a man of the finest Brahmin type with what is best in European education added, that is the impression he gives.”³⁶

He understood the reasons that led to the resignation of the Congress ministries after the declaration of the War in 1939 and anticipated complications that indeed did arise. And when the British Cabinet made certain proposals for the resolution of the political deadlock and sent Sir Stafford Cripps in March 1943 to negotiate on that basis, Sri Aurobindo saw in them a good possibility for Indian leadership to advance India’s progress to freedom. He sent a message to Sir Stafford:

“I have heard your broadcast. As one who has been a nationalist leader and worker for India’s independence, though now my activity is no longer in the political but in the spiritual field, I wish to express my appreciation of all you have done to bring about this offer. I welcome it as an opportunity given to India to determine for herself, and organise in all liberty of choice, her freedom and unity, and take an effective place among the world’s free nations. I hope that it will be accepted and right use made of it, putting aside all discords and divisions. I hope too that friendly relations between Britain and India replacing the past struggles, will be a step towards a greater world union in which, as a free nation, her spiritual force will contribute to build for mankind a better and happier life. In this light, I offer my public adhesion, in case it can be of any help in your work. (31.3.1942).”

Sri Aurobindo followed up this public statement with an urgent appeal to the Congress Working Committee through a special emissary S. Duraiswami Iyer. Sisir Kumar Mitra writes in *The Liberator*:

“The viewpoints which Sri Aurobindo instructed his envoy to place before the Congress leaders...were:(1) Japan’s imperialism being young and based on industrial and military power and moving westward, was a greater menace to India than the British imperialism which was old, which the country had learnt to deal with and which was on the way to elimination. (2) It would be better to get into the saddle and not be particular about the legal basis of the power. Once the power came into

our hands and we occupied seats of power, we could establish our positions and assert ourselves. (3) The proposed Cabinet would provide opportunities for the Congress and the Muslims to understand each other and pull together for the country's good, especially at that time of the crisis. (4) The Hindu Mahasabha also being represented, the Hindus as such would have a chance of proving their capacity to govern India not only for the benefit of the Hindus but for the whole country. (5) The main problem was to organise the strength of India in order to repel the threatened aggression."

But the appeal fell on deaf ears. Sri Aurobindo was not surprised, for he said he knew the advice would not be accepted. Then why did he try at all? "Well, I have done a bit of *kartavya karma* (disinterested work)" was his reply with a smile.

The Cripps Mission failed.

K. M. Munshi, one of top leaders of India at that time, was to observe later: "He (Sri Aurobindo) saw into the heart of things. His perception of the political situation in India was always unerring. When the world war came in 1939 it was he of the unerring eye who said that the triumph of England and France was the triumph of the divine forces over the demoniac forces. He spoke again when Sir Stafford Cripps came with his first proposal. He said, 'India should accept it.' We rejected the advice...but today we realise that if the first proposal had been accepted, there would have been no partition, no refugees, and no Kashmir problem."

After the war, the Labour Government of U. K. sent a Cabinet Mission to India in 1946 for fresh talks. Asked to give his views on the mission by *Amrit Bazar Patrika* a leading daily in the country, Sri Aurobindo said:

"Sri Aurobindo thinks it unnecessary to volunteer a personal pronouncement. His position is known. He has always stood for India's complete independence which he was the first to advocate publicly and without compromise as the only ideal worthy of a self-respecting nation.

In 1910 he authorised the publication of his prediction that after a long period of wars, world-wide upheavals and revolutions beginning after four years, India would achieve her freedom. Lately he has said that freedom was coming soon and nothing could prevent it. He has always foreseen that eventually Britain would approach India for an amicable agreement, conceding her freedom. What he had foreseen is now coming to pass and the British Cabinet Mission is the sign. It remains for the nation's leaders to make a right and full use of the opportunity. In any case, whatever the immediate outcome, the Power that has been working out this event will not be denied, the final result, India's liberation, is sure."(24.3.1946).

India is Free

WRITING IN 1911, Sri Aurobindo said: “God always keeps for himself a chosen country in which the higher knowledge is through all chances and dangers, by the few or the many, continually preserved, and for the present, in this *Chaturyuga* at least, that country is India.”

And he always maintained that India could not rise to her full stature and discharge her responsibilities till she was free from external domination. He fought for the freedom of India in the larger interests of humanity.

Now some time in 1920 when the Mother and Sri Aurobindo were in meditation, the Mother reached a state of consciousness from which she told Sri Aurobindo : “India is free’

Sri Aurobindo : How?

The Mother: Without any fight, without a battle, without a revolution. The English themselves will leave, for the condition of the world will be such that they won't be able to do anything else except go away.³⁷

It took twenty-seven years for that vision of the truth-plane to actualise itself on the *material plane*. And it took place true to the letter. India attained independence on August 15, 1947 which was also the birthday of Sri Aurobindo. He issued a remarkable message expressing his gratification at the significance of the coincidence and describing how certain dreams of his from an early age were getting fulfilled or were on their way to fulfillment. This message has been reproduced in full at the beginning of this book.

It is needless to say how unhappy he was with the developments that followed the partition of the country. When Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated on January 30, 1948, he issued this statement in response to a request from the All India Radio:

“I would have preferred silence in the face of these circumstances that surround us. For any words we can find fall flat amid such happenings. This much, however, I will say that the Light which led us to freedom, though not yet to unity, still burns and will burn on till it conquers. I believe firmly that a great and united future is the destiny of this nation and its peoples. The power that brought us through so much struggle and suffering to freedom, will achieve also, through whatever strife or trouble, the aim which so poignantly occupied the thoughts of the fallen leader at the time of his tragic ending; as it brought us freedom, it will bring us unity. A free and united India will be there and the Mother will gather around her sons and weld them into a single national strength in the life of a great and united people.”³⁸ (5-2-1948)

Even before the attainment of independence he was concerned with the question of what use India was going to make of the freedom, for her own peoples and for the world. This is reflected in a message he gave to the Andhra University on the occasion of the presentation of the *Sir Cattamanchi Ramalinga Reddy National Prize* to him (*in absentia*) at the convocation* held at the University on December 11, 1948:

*The citation read by Dr.C.R. Reddy is given in Appendix.

MESSAGE TO THE ANDHRA UNIVERSITY

You have asked me for a message and anything I write, since it is to the Andhra University that that I am addressing my message, if it can be called by that name, should be pertinent to your University, its function, its character and the work it has to do. But it is difficult for me at this juncture when momentous decisions are being taken which are likely to determine not only the form and pattern of this country's Government and administration but the pattern of its destiny, the build and make-up of the nation's character, its position in the world with regard to other nations, its choice of what itself shall be, not to turn my eyes in that direction. There is one problem facing the country which concerns us dearly and to this I shall now turn and deal with it, however inadequately,—the demand for the reconstruction of the artificial British-made Presidencies and Provinces into natural divisions forming a new system, new and yet founded on the principle of diversity in unity attempted by ancient India. India, shut into a separate existence by the Himalayas and the ocean, has always been the home of a peculiar people with characteristics of its own recognisably distinct from all others, with its own distinct civilisation, way of life, way of the spirit, a separate culture, arts, building of society. It has absorbed all that has entered into it, put upon all the Indian stamp, welded the most diverse elements into its fundamental unity. But it has also been throughout a congeries of diverse peoples, lands, kingdoms and, in earlier times, republics also, diverse races, sub-nations with a marked character of their own, developing different brands or forms of civilisation and culture, many schools of art and architecture which yet succeeded in fitting into the general Indian type of civilisation and culture. India's history throughout has been marked by a tendency, a constant effort to unite all this diversity of elements into a single political whole under a central imperial rule so that India might be politically as well as culturally one. Even after a rift had been created by the irruption of the Mohammedan peoples with their very different religion and social structure, there continued a constant effort of political unification and there was a tendency towards a mingling of cultures and their mutual influence on each other; even some heroic attempts were made to discover or create a common religion built out of these two apparently irreconcilable faiths and here too there were mutual influences. But throughout India's history the political unity was never entirely attained and for this there were several causes,—first,

vastness of space and insufficiency of communications preventing the drawing close of all these different peoples; secondly, the method used which was the military domination by one people or one imperial dyansty over the rest of the country which led to a succession of empires, none of them permanent; lastly, the absence of any will to crush out of existence all these different kingdoms and fuse together these different peoples and force them into a single substance and a single shape. Then came the British Empire in India which recast the whole country into artificial provinces made for its own convenience, disregarding the principle of division into regional peoples but not abolishing that division. For there had grown up out of the original elements a natural system of sub-nations with different languages, literatures and other traditions of their own, the four Dravidian peoples, Bengal, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Punjab, Sind, Assam, Orissa, Nepal, the Hindi speaking peoples of the North Rajputana and Bihar. British rule with its provincial administration did not unite these peoples but it did impose upon them the habit of a common type of administration, a closer intercommunication through the English language and by the education it gave there was created a more diffused and more militant form of patriotism, the desire for liberation and the need of unity in the struggle to achieve that liberation. A sufficient fighting unity was brought about to win freedom, but freedom obtained did not carry with it a complete union of the country. On the contrary, India was deliberately split on the basis of the two-nation theory into Pakistan and Hindustan with the deadly consequences which we know.

In taking over the administration from Britain we had inevitably to follow the line of least resistance and proceed on the basis of the artificial British-made provinces, at least for the time; this provisional arrangement now threatens to become permanent, at least in the main and some see an advantage in this permanence. For they think it will help the unification of the country and save us from the necessity of preserving regional sub-nations which in the past kept a country from an entire and thorough-going unification and uniformity. In a rigorous unification they see the only true union, a single nation with a standardised and uniform administration, language, literature, culture, art, education,—all carried on through the agency of one national tongue. How far such a conception can be carried out in the future one cannot forecast, but at present it is obviously impracticable, and it is doubtful if it is for India

truly desirable. The ancient diversities of the country carried in them great advantages as well as drawbacks. By these differences the country was made the home of many living and pulsating centres of life, art, culture, a richly and brilliantly coloured diversity in unity; all was not drawn up into a few provincial capitals or an imperial metropolis, other towns and regions remaining subordinated and indistinctive or even culturally asleep; the whole nation lived with a full life in its many parts and this increased enormously the creative energy of the whole. There is no possibility any longer that this diversity will endanger or diminish the unity of India. Those vast spaces which kept her people from closeness and a full interplay have been abolished in their separating effect by the march of Science and the swiftness of the means of communication. The idea of federation and complete machinery for its perfect working have been discovered and will be at full work. Above all, the spirit of patriotic unity has been too firmly established in the people to be easily effaced or diminished, and it would be more endangered by refusing to allow the natural play of life of the sub-nations than by satisfying their legitimate aspirations. The Congress itself in the days before liberation came had pledged itself to the formation of linguistic provinces and to follow it out, if not immediately, yet as early as may conveniently be, might well be considered the wisest course. India's national life will then be founded on her natural strengths and the principle of unity in diversity which has always been normal to her and its fulfilment the fundamental course of her being and its very nature, the many in the One, would place her on the sure foundation of her Swabhava and Swadharma...A union of states and regional peoples would again be the form of a united India.

In this new regime your University will find its function and fulfilment. Its origin has been different from that of other Indian Universities; they were established by the initiative of a foreign Government as a means of introducing their own civilisation into India, situated in the capital towns of the Presidencies and formed as teaching and examining bodies with purely academic aims: Benaras and Aligarh had a different origin but were all-India institutions serving the two chief religious communities of the country. Andhra University has been created by a patriotic Andhra initiative, situated not in a Presidency capital but in an Andhra town and serving consciously the life of a regional people. The home of a robust and virile and energetic race, great by the part it had played in

the past in the political life of India, great by its achievements in art, architecture, sculpture, music, Andhra looks back upon imperial memories, a place in the succession of empires and imperial dynasties which reigned over a large part of the country; it looks back on the more recent memory of the glories of the last Hindu Empire of Vijayanagar,— a magnificent record for any people. Your University can take its high position as a centre of light and learning, knowledge and culture which can train the youth of Andhra to be worthy of their forefathers; the great past should lead to a future as great or even greater... There is still a wider field in which India will need the services of men of ability and character from all parts of the country, the international field. For she stands already as a considerable international figure and this will grow as time goes on into vast proportions; she is likely in time to take her place as one of the preponderant States whose voices will be strongest and their lead and their action determinative of the world's future. For all this she needs men whose training as well as their talent, genius and force of character is of the first order. In all these fields your University can be of supreme service and do a work of immeasurable importance.

In this hour, in the second year of its liberation the nation has to awaken to many more very considerable problems, to vast possibilities opening before her but also to dangers and difficulties that may, if not wisely dealt with, become formidable. There is a disordered world situation left by the war, full of risks and sufferings and shortages and threatening another catastrophe which can only be solved by the united effort of the peoples and can only be truly met by an effort at world-union such as was conceived at San Francisco but has not till now been very successful in the practice; still the effort has to be continued and new devices found which will make easier the difficult transition from the perilous divisions of the past and present to a harmonious world-order; for otherwise there can be no escape from continuous calamity and collapse. There are deeper issues for India herself, since by following certain tempting directions she may conceivably become a nation like many others evolving an opulent industry and commerce, a powerful organisation of social and political life, an immense military strength, practising power-politics with a high degree of success, guarding and extending zealously her gains and her interests, dominating even a large part of the world, but in this apparently magnificent progression forfeiting its, Swadharma, losing its soul. Then ancient India and her spirit might

disappear altogether and we would have only one more nation like the others and that would be a real gain neither to the world nor to us. There is a question whether she may prosper more harmlessly in the outward life yet lose altogether her richly massed and firmly held spiritual experience and knowledge. It would be a tragic irony of fate if India were to throw away her spiritual heritage at the very moment when in the rest of the world there is more and more a turning towards her for spiritual help and a saving Light. This must not and will surely not happen; but it cannot be said that the danger is not there. There are indeed other numerous and difficult problems that face this country or will very soon face it. No doubt we will win through, but we must not disguise from ourselves the fact that after these long years of subjection and its cramping and impairing effects a great inner as well as outer liberation and change, a vast inner and outer progress is needed if we are to fulfil India's true destiny.

Warnings on the World Situation

MEANWHILE OMINOUS CLOUDS were forming on the Asian horizon. Sri Aurobindo assessed the various possibilities that were pressing to actualise themselves, including the threat of yet another war, and the prospect of the United Nations Organisation then struggling to find its feet, and wrote (at the end of 1949) a prophetic study of contemporary history as a postscript to the revised edition of his *Ideal of Human Unity* then under preparation. He wrote:

“In Asia a more perilous situation has arisen, standing sharply across the way to any possibility of a continental unity of the peoples of this part of the world in the emergence of communist China. This creates a gigantic block which could easily englobe the whole of Northern Asia in a combination between two enormous communist powers, Russia and China, and would overshadow with a threat of absorption South-Western Asia and Tibet and might be pushed to overrun all up to the whole frontier of India, menacing her security and that of Western Asia with the possibility of an invasion and an overrunning and subjection by penetration or even by overwhelming military force to an unwanted ideology, political and social institutions and dominance of this militant mass of Communism whose push might easily prove irresistible. In any case, the continent would be divided between two huge blocs which might enter into active mutual opposition and the possibility of a stupendous world-conflict would arise dwarfing anything previously experienced: the possibility of any world-union might, even without any actual outbreak of hostilities, be indefinitely postponed by the incompatibility of interests and ideologies on a scale which would render their inclusion in a single body hardly realisable. The possibility of a coming into being of three or four continental unions, which might subsequently coalesce into a single unity would then be very remote and, except after a world-shaking struggle hardly feasible.

At one time it was possible to regard as an eventual possibility the extension of socialism to all the nations; an international unity could then have been created by its innate tendencies which turned naturally towards an overcoming of the dividing force of the nation-idea with its separatism and its turn towards competitions and rivalries often culminating in open strife; this could have been regarded as the natural road and could have turned in fact into the eventual way towards world union. But, in the first place, Socialism has under certain stresses proved to be by no means immune against infection by the dividing national spirit and its international tendency might not survive its coming into power in separate national states and a resulting inheritance of competing national interests and necessities: the old spirit might very well survive in the new socialist bodies. But also there might not be or not for a long time to come an inevitable tide of the spread of Socialism to all the peoples of the earth: other forces might arise which would dispute what seemed at one time and perhaps still seems the most likely outcome of existing world tendencies; the conflict between Communism and the less extreme socialistic idea which still respects the principle of liberty, even though a restricted liberty, and the freedom of conscience, of thought, of personality of the individual, if this difference perpetuated itself, might create a serious difficulty in the formation of a World-State...

As Russia and America, in spite of the constant opposition of policy and ideology, have avoided so far any step that would make the preservation of the U.N.O. too difficult or impossible, this third body (possible successor to U.N.O.) would be preserved by the same necessity or imperative utility of its continued existence. The same forces would work in the same direction and a creation of an effective world-union would still be possible; in the end the mass of general needs of the race and its need of self-preservation could well be relied on to make it inevitable."

There was an explosive situation when on June 25, 1950 there was an invasion of South Korea by the communist forces of North Korea and the American intervention was appealed for by the President of South Korea. In his analysis of the issues (for the editor of Mother India) Sri Aurobindo observed:

“The whole affair is as plain as a pike-staff. It is the first move in the Communist plan of campaign to dominate and take possession first of these Northern parts and then of South-East Asia as a preliminary to their manoeuvres with regard to the rest of the continent—in passing, Tibet, as a gate opening into India.

If they succeed, there is no reason why domination of the whole world should not follow by steps. Truman seems to have understood the situation if we can judge from his moves in Korea, but it is to be seen whether he is strong enough and determined enough to carry the matter through.”³⁹ (28-6-1950)

There is an interesting sequel to this note on Korea. When a member of the Indian Parliament, Sudhir Ghose, showed a copy of this statement to President Kennedy, the latter thought there must have been a typing mistake making 1960 into 1950: He found it difficult to conceive that a person engaged in meditation in a corner of India could foresee this move of Communist China as early as 1950.

Ashram Developments

TILL 1939 THE ashram was a well-knit community, sadhana oriented. Children were not admitted and there were no families as such. After the outbreak of the War, however, a gradual change came over. Due to insecure conditions created by the threat of Japanese invasion, a few bombings and the general sense of fear in the north-eastern regions of the country, a large number of devotees sought refuge in the ashram. The Mother would not refuse and the ashram doors were opened. Men, women, children—all came down and found their place of refuge in the ashram at Pondicherry.

That was how it became necessary for the Mother to start a school for children in 1943 with a small number of students. This school was to develop in due course into the present Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education where Sri Aurobindo's seminal ideas of right education and the Mother's philosophy of fivefold education with special emphasis on the perfection of the body are being worked out.

It may be mentioned here that the communal riots in 1946 and local disturbances in Pondicherry gave a filip to a systematic training in physical fitness and self-defence to the students; the adults of the ashram—including women—were encouraged to take advantage of the facilities. When doubts were voiced as to the advisability of sports and physical training in an ashram, Sri Aurobindo wrote putting things in the proper perspective and underlined the necessity of this discipline in any scheme of education and character building.

A number of journals came to be started during these years. On August 15, 1942 was issued the first Number of *Sri Aurobindo Mandir Annual* in Calcutta. The *Bartika* Quarterly (Bengali) was also started in Calcutta in the same year. *The Advent*, "A Quarterly devoted to the Exposition of Sri Aurobindo's Vision of the Future" began its career in February 1944 from Madras. *Sri Aurobindo Circle* (Annual) commenced from April 1945 in Bombay. Also started in Bombay, in the year 1949,

was the *Mother India* (Fortnightly)—which was later converted into a month (from Pondicherry). In February 1949 was begun the *Bulletin of Physical Education*, a Quarterly in English-French, issued by the ashram. This was later converted into the *Bulletin of the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education* (English-French-Hindi). Sri Aurobindo wrote special articles in the first seven issues of the *Bulletin* which have now been issued in book-form under the title *Supramental Manifestation*. These relate to the role and prospects of the physical body in the Integral Yoga, speculation of the likely process or processes of the transformation by the supramental Consciousness. Force, the formation of the Mind of Light etc.

A cultural mission deputed by the Government of France called on Sri Aurobindo in September 1947 to pay him the homage of the French Government and to propose the setting up at Pondicherry of an institute for research and study of Indian and European cultures under the guidance of Sri Aurobindo. It was led by a leading French figure, Maurice Schumann. Sri Aurobindo suggested an immediate merger of the French possessions with the Indian Union, with a right for them to maintain their contact with France. This however, was not then acceptable to Delhi, though, within a few years, a settlement was arrived at very much on the same lines.

On July 9, 1950, K. M. Munshi, old student of Sri Aurobindo at Baroda and the then Food Minister in the Union Government visited the ashram and met Sri Aurobindo. Meeting him after more than forty years, he describes: "I saw before me a being completely transformed, radiant, blissful, enveloped in an atmosphere of godlike calm. He spoke in a low, clear voice which stirred the depths of my being. I saw in him, not my old professor, but something different. It was absolute integration of personality; attachment, wrath and fear in him had been transformed into a power which was at the same time beautiful and calm, Central idea in Aryan culture materialised in human shape, one of the greatest architects of creative life."

Savitri

FOR OVER FOUR decades and more Sri Aurobindo had been silently working on an epic poem, *Savitri*. Choosing the Savitri-Satyavan legend in the Mahabharata, he had started developing it on his own lines as far back as in Baroda. He perceived and noted:

“The tale of *Satyavan* and *Savitri* is recited in the Mahabharata as a story of conjugal love conquering death. But this legend is, as shown by many features of the human tale, one of the many symbolic myths of the Vedic cycle. *Satyavan* is the soul carrying the divine truth of being within itself but descended into the grip of death and ignorance; *Savitri* is the Divine Word, daughter of the Sun, goddess of the supreme Truth who comes down and is born to save; *Aswapati*, the Lord of the Horse, her human father, is the Lord of Tapasya, the concentrated energy of spiritual endeavour that helps us to rise from the mortal to the immortal planes; *Dyumatsena*, Lord of the Shining Hosts, father of Satyavan, is the Divine Mind here fallen blind, losing its celestial kingdom of vision, and through that loss its kingdom of glory. Still this is not a mere allegory, the characters are not personified qualities, but incarnations or emanations of living and conscious Forces with whom we can enter into concrete touch and they take human bodies in order to help man and show him the way from his mortal state to a divine consciousness and immortal life.”

He converted it from a simple tale lauding the potency of conjugal fidelity into a poem of humanity uplifted by the Divine Grace from darkness to Light, from death to Immortality. As he explains, he wrote the poem for himself. He used it in the manner of the Vedic Rishi using the *mantric* utterance for the ascension of his consciousness. He revised it from each successive level of consciousness he attained, so that certain portions are said to have received as many as twenty revisions. The

result is a rare perfection. It is his testament to humanity, the *Life Divine* in poetry. The work was always leisurely and there used to be interruptions due to more pressing calls.

One day in 1950, he said to Nirodbaran who was his amanuensis: "Take up Savitri. I want to finish it soon." That was unlike Sri Aurobindo who was never in a hurry; he always seemed to have eternity before him. Besides, some of his responses and remarks, now and then, were unusual. Ailments had begun to appear in his body. Things worked up—rather were allowed to work upto a climax and uraemia set in. When things were getting serious, an attendant asked, "Are you not using your force to get rid of the disease?"

"No" was his reply. It unnerved everyone. When he was further asked "Why not?", he simply said, "Can't explain, you won't understand." The fact was that he had taken the decision to leave his body.

Word had already come from Delhi, through Surendra Mohan Ghose, that the *Bhṛigu Samhita* had read. ".....After 78 years he will develop a ghrina (aversion) towards his body, and then he may leave his body: otherwise death is in his control."

A few months earlier when someone spoke of a prediction by an astrologer in Western India that Sri Aurobindo would 'undo' himself, Sri Aurobindo had shown curiosity at that report! He refused to intervene and let things take their course. The Mother remarked that he was losing interest in himself.

He withdrew from his body at 1.25 a.m. on December 5, 1950.

But that was not the finale. When, in the course of the day, preparations were being made to inter the body, it was found that instead of signs of decomposition, there was a bluish golden light, what the Mother termed a concentration of the Supramental Light in the body. It was decided to keep the body lying on the bed so long as it remained intact. It was only on the morning of the 9th that the first signs of decomposition appeared and the body was placed in the Samadhi on either side of which there is now a plaque with an inscription by the Mother which reads:

“To THEE who hast been the material envelope of our Master, to THEE our infinite gratitude. Before THEE who hast done so much for us, who hast worked, struggled, suffered, hoped, endured so much, before THEE who hast willed all, attempted all, prepared, achieved all for us, before THEE we bow down and implore that we may never forget, even for a moment, all we owe to THEE.”

Epilogue

IT MAY BE observed that whenever great spiritual personalities with a mission pass away, their work acquires a greater momentum and intensity. This has happened in a pronounced manner in the case of Sri Aurobindo.

The Teaching has spread into a dynamic movement. The ashram has expanded in all directions under the aegis of the Mother. Between 1950 when the ashram strength was about 800 and 1973 when the Mother *passed* away, it went up to double the number. The activities of the ashram also multiplied. The Centre of Education came to be recognised as a valuable project of research into Education for Life, and talent from different parts of the world is involved in it. A World Union International was started in 1958, for propagating and working for Sri Aurobindo's Ideal of Human Unity on a spiritual basis. The Sri Aurobindo Society was floated to collect resources for the ashram work.

A number of Centres for study, spiritual practice and orientation of life on the lines of the Teaching came to be started all over the country and abroad. In Orissa State alone there are more than three thousand *pathachakras*, study circles. Ashram literature has grown; the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, those of the disciples, critical dissertations, translations into various languages—Indian and foreign. Courses in Sri Aurobindo's philosophy have been prescribed in some of the universities at post-graduate levels.

A further step in the expansion of the Movement was taken in 1968 with the founding of Auroville, the City of Dawn, a few miles from Pondicherry. It is a project with a world-wide membership seeking to evolve a pattern of collective living that could form a model for the new world in the making. Combining individual freedom with collective responsibility, governance proceeding from a consciousness that is

essentially spiritual, Auroville is to develop into a universal township organised around the Ideas of Human Unity and perfection of Consciousness.

A grateful country observed Sri Aurobindo's *Birth Centenary* in 1972. The Government of India sponsored many significant projects including an international seminar. Sri Aurobindo Chairs were founded in certain Universities. Attention was focussed on Sri Aurobindo's contribution to the renaissance of India and the progress of world thought.

Sri Aurobindo's Philosophy of Evolution of Consciousness as the true meaning of the world movement has to be broadly accepted by the higher mind of humanity, Spiritual movements are no longer other-worldly in their orientation; Sri Aurobindo's vision and content of Life Divine on earth, the gospel of perfect man in a perfect society is no longer regarded as a chimera or a dream.

His insistence on a total change of man, not merely in his mind or heart, is finding expression in the growing trends towards holistic progress, integration of personality, harmonisation of God, Nature and Man.

His social philosophy of progress being spiral and not cyclic, moving always upward on the whole, is gaining acceptance among thinkers in the field. His study and perception that the society is steadily moving into a stage preparing for a classless and strifeless living based on the truths of harmony, love and unity is being confirmed in the farsights of the day. So too his confident anticipation of the world nations moving in the direction of a cohesive and yet supple World-Union is approaching fulfilment in diverse ways, despite some appearances to the contrary.

Sri Aurobindo has been not only a revolutionary who has broken new ground in politics, in the realms of thought and Spirit; not only the founder of the Philosophy of Life Divine for man and the Pathfinder to its realisation; not only a Poet hewing ways for the inspired utterance of the gathering Revelations of Life, Love and Light; but he is also an unequalled reconciler of the different, warring ways that humanity has taken in history in a comprehensive, universal vision in which each finds its justifying truth and all point to a common Destiny echoing the call of the ancient Seer in Rigveda:

Common Mantra have all these, a common gathering to union;
one mind common to all, they are together in one knowledge;

One and common be your aspiration, united your hearts, common
to you be your mind,—so that close companionship may be yours.

Sidelights

On Sri Aurobindo's Thought

(Compiled from Writings and Talks)

AIM

Beatitude is God's aim for humanity; get this supreme good for thyself first that thou mayst distribute it entirely to thy fellow-beings.

He who acquires for himself alone, acquires ill though he may call it heaven and virtue.

ALTRUISM

Altruism is good for man, but less good when it is a form of supreme self-indulgence and lives by pampering the selfishness of others.

Selfishness kills the soul; destroy it. But take care that your altruism does not kill the souls of others.

Very usually, altruism is only the sublimest form of selfishness.

ART

Humanity is not organised for art.

If Art's service is but to imitate Nature, then burn all the picture galleries and let us have instead photographic studios. It is because Art reveals what Nature hides that a small picture is worth more than all the jewels of the millionaires and the treasures of the princes.

ASCETIC AND WORLD-ACTION

Thou thinkest the ascetic in his cave or in his mountaintop a stone and a do-nothing. What dost thou know? He may be filling the world with the mighty currents of his will and changing it by the pressure of his soul-state.

ASURA

The Asura is really the dark side of God on the mental plane. Mind is the very field of the Asura. His characteristic is egoistic strength which

refuses the Higher Law. The Asura has got self-control, tapas, intelligence; only all that is for his ego.

On the vital plane the corresponding forces we call the Rakshasas which represent violent passions and impulses.

There are other beings on the vital plane which we call *pramartha* and *pisaca* and these manifest, more or less on the physico-vital plane.

ATHEISM

Atheism is the shadow or dark side of the highest perception of God. Every formula we form about God, though always true as a symbol, becomes false when we accept it as a sufficient formula. The Atheist and Agnostic come to remind us of our error.

Atheism is a necessary protest against the wickedness of the Churches and the narrowness of creed. God uses it as a stone to smash these soiled card-houses.

The Atheist is God playing at hide and seek with Himself; but is the Theist any other? Well, perhaps, for he has seen the shadow of God and clutches at it.

BEGINNING AND END

The beginning and end of things is a conventional term of our experience; in their true existence, these terms have no reality, there is no end and no beginning.

BODY

Body has no, desires, it has needs and it knows what it needs.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Absurd. The man who murders was, most probably, under possession or impulse of some being. When the man is executed the being takes possession of another. Many of those who commit murder have admitted that they had their first impulse when they saw an execution.

CHARITABLE

Examine thyself without pity, then thou will be more charitable and pitiful to others.

CHARITY

The existence of poverty is the proof of an unjust and ill-organised society, and our public charities are but the first tardy awakening of the conscience of a robber.

Fling not thy alms abroad everywhere in an ostentation of charity; understand and love where thou helpst. Let thy soul grow, within thee.

Help the poor while the poor are with thee; but study also and strive that there may be no poor for thy assistance.

CHRIST

Strange! the Germans have disproved the existence of Christ; yet his crucifixion remains still a greater historic fact than the death of Caesar.

COMMUNISM

The communistic principle of society is intrinsically as superior to the individualistic as is brotherhood to jealousy and mutual slaughter; but all the practical schemes of Socialism invented in Europe are a yoke, a tyranny and a prison.

If communism ever re-establishes itself successfully upon earth, it must be on a foundation of soul's brotherhood and the death of egoism. A forced association and a mechanical comradeship would end in a world-wide fiasco.

COUNTRY

Our Country is God the Mother; speak not evil of her unless thou canst do it with love and tenderness.

CROSS

The Cross is in yoga the symbol of the soul and nature in their strong and perfect union, but because of our fall into the impurities of ignorance it has become the symbol of suffering and purification.

DEATH

Death is sometimes a rude valet, but when he changes this robe of earth for that brighter raiment, his horseplay and impertinence can be pardoned.

Death is the question Nature puts continually to Life and her reminder to it that it has not yet found itself. If there were no seige of death, the creature would be bound forever in the form of an imperfect living. Pursued by death he awakes to the idea of perfect life and seeks out its means and its possibility.

DEBATE

When, O eager disputant, thou hast prevailed in a debate, then art thou greatly to be pitied, for thou hast lost a chance of widening knowledge.

DEFEAT

All is not settled when a cause is humanly lost and hopeless; all is settled, only when the soul renounces its effort.

DEMOCRACY

The gain of democracy is the security of the individual's life, liberty and goods from the caprices of the tyrant one or the selfish few its evil is the decline of greatness in humanity.

DESIRE

Only by perfect renunciation of desire or by perfect satisfaction of desire can the utter embrace of God be experienced, for in both ways the essential precondition is effected,—desire perishes.

DICTATORSHIP

Dictatorship is as old as the world. When there is a confusion and muddle in the affairs of men or nations, the dictator has come, set things right and pulled out the race from it.

DISEASE

Disease will always return to the body if the soul is flawed; for the sins of the mind are the secret cause of the sins of the body.

DIVINE INSTRUMENT

Men in the world have two lights, duty and principle; but he who has passed over to God, has done with both and replaced them by God's will. If men abuse thee for this, care not, O divine instrument, but go on thy way like the wind or the sun fostering and destroying.

DIVINE LIFE

Turn all things to honey; this is the law of divine living.

ELEMENTALS

Ignorant forces working on the subtle-physical plane.

There are two kinds of 'elemental': one mischievous and the other innocent. What the Europeans call the gnomes come under this category.

ENEMY

Men talk of enemies, but where are they? I only see wistlers of one party or the other in the great arena of the universe.

ENLARGEMENT

The perfect cosmic vision and cosmic sentiment is the cure of all error and suffering; but most men succeed only in enlarging the range of their ego.

EXPLORE WITHIN

To see the composition of the sun or the lines of Mars is doubtless a great achievement; but when thou hast the instrument that can show thee a man's soul as thou seest a picture, then thou wilt smile at the wonders of physical Science as the playthings of babies.

FAILURES

When I look back on my past life, I see that if I had not failed and suffered, I would have lost my life's supreme blessings: yet at the time of the suffering and failure, I was vexed with the sense of calamity.

Souls that do not aspire are God's failures; but Nature is pleased and loves to multiply them because they assure her of stability and prolong her empire.

Those who are poor, ignorant, ill-born or ill-bred are not the common herd; the common herd are all who are satisfied with pettiness and an average humanity.

FAITH

Faith in the heart is the obscure and often distorted reflection of a hidden knowledge.

So long as a Cause has on its side one soul that is intangible in faith, it cannot perish.

FAITHS THREE

Mental faith is the anticipation of the knowledge that is coming. Vital faith anticipates the effectuation that is coming. Faith in the physical anticipates what is going to be realised. Effectuation is the work of force, realisation is a fact.

FATE

Fate is God's foreknowledge outside Space and Time of all that in Space and Time shall yet happen; what He has foreseen, Power and Necessity work out by the the conflict of forces.

FLOWERS

The jasmine is a very psychic flower. The rose is strongly vital; the inner soul is lost in the form there. The lotus, of course, is a symbolic flower. It represents the opening of the inner being to the higher truth.

GARB ASCETIC

Honour the garb of the ascetic, but look also at the wearer, lest hypocrisy occupy the holy places and saintliness become a legend.

GENIUS

Genius is Nature's first attempt to liberate the imprisoned god out of her human mould; the mould has to suffer in the process. It is astonishing that the cracks are so few and unimportant.

GOD

What is God after all? An eternal child playing an eternal game in an eternal garden.

God is there not only in the still small voice, but in the fire and in the whirlwind.

A God who cannot smile could not have created this humorous universe. There will always be more in God than the thought of man has ever conceived or the tongue of man has ever uttered.

GOD AND HUMANITY

This is a miracle that men can love God, yet fail to love humanity. With whom are they in love then?

GOD AND NATURE

God and Nature are like a boy and girl at play and in love.

They hide and run from each other when glimpsed so that they may be sought after and chased and captured.

GOD AND WORLD

As the light of a star reaches the earth hundreds of years after the star has ceased to exist, so the event already accomplished in Brahman at the beginning manifests itself now in our material experience.

GOD'S WILL

How shall I know God's will with me? I have to put egoism out of me, hunting it from every lair and burrow and bathe my purified and naked soul in His infinite workings; then He Himself will reveal it to me.

GODS

Be wide in me, O Varuna; be mighty in me, O Indra; O Sun, be very bright and luminous; O Moon, be full of charm and sweetness. Be fierce and terrible, O Rudra; be impetuous and swift, O Maruts; be strong and bold, O Aryama; be voluptuous and pleasurable, O Bhaga; be tender and kind and loving and passionate, O Mitra. Be bright and revealing, O Dawn; O Night, be solemn and pregnant. O Life, be full,

ready and buoyant; O Death, lead my steps from mansion to mansion. Harmonise all these, O Brahmanaspati, Let me not be subject to these gods, O Kali.

GOOD AND EVIL

In God's providence there is no evil, but only good or its preparation.

GRACE

All first awakening is an act of Grace. You are given a glimpse and then you have to work it out.

HATRED

Hate not the oppressor, for, if he is strong, thy hate increases his force of resistance if he is weak, thy hate was needless.

Hatred is a sword of power, but its edge is always double. It is like the *Kriya* of the ancient magicians which, if balked of its prey, returned in fury to devour its sender.

Hatred is the sign of a secret attraction that is eager to flee, from itself and furious to deny its own existence.

HEART

God speaks to the heart when the brain cannot understand Him.

HUMANITY

It is impossible to change humanity by political machinery.

HUMOUR

If the *siddha* never laughs it is an imperfection.

HISTORY QUESTIONED

There are four great events in history, the, siege of Troy, the life and crucifixion of Christ, the exile of Krishna in Brindaban and the colloquy with Arjuna on the field of Kurukshetra. The siege of Troy created Hellas, the exile in Brindaban created devotional religion (for before there was only meditation and worship), Christ from his cross humanised Europe,

the colloquy at Kurukshetra will yet liberate humanity. Yet it is said that none of these four events ever happened.

HOPE

There are two for whom there is hope, the man who has felt God's touch and been drawn to it and the sceptical seeker and self-convinced atheist; but for the formularists of all the religions and the parrots of free thought, they are dead souls who follow a death that they call living.

HUMANITY

Family, nationality, humanity are Vishnu's three strides from an isolated to a collective unity. The first has been fulfilled, we yet strive for the perfection of the second, towards the third we are reaching out our hands and the pioneer work is already attempted.

ILLUSION

Chance is not in this universe; the idea of illusion is itself an illusion. There was never illusion yet in the human mind that did not conceal and disfigure a truth.

IMMORTALITY

Immortality is not the survival of the mental personality after death, though that also is true, but the waking possession of the unborn and deathless Self of which the body is only an instrument and a shadow.

IMPOSSIBLES

What I cannot do now is the sign of what I shall do hereafter. The sense of impossibility is the beginning of all possibilities.

Impossibility is only a sum of greater unrealised possibles. It veils an advanced state and a yet unaccomplished journey.

INACTION

The love of inaction is folly and the scorn of inaction is folly; there is no inaction. The stone lying inert upon the sands, which is kicked

away in an idle moment, has been producing its effect upon the hemisphere.

INCORRIGIBLE

Selfishness is the only sin, meanness the only vice, hatred the only criminality. All else can easily be turned into good, but these are obstinate resisters of deity.

INDIAN MEDICINE

Ayurveda is the first system of medicine; it originated in India. Medicine, mathematical notation and astrology, all went from India to Arabia, and from there they travelled to Greece. The three humours of which Hippocrates and Galen speak are an Indian idea.

INSPIRATION

Inspiration is a slender river of brightness leaping from a vast and eternal knowledge; it exceeds reason more perfectly than reason exceeds the knowledge of the senses.

JOURNEY OF LIFE

Stride swiftly, for the goal is far; rest not unduly for thy Master is waiting for thee at the end of thy Journey.

KARMA

The Law of Karma is not mathematical or mechanical.

When certain energies are put forward then certain results tend to be produced. Karma is not the fundamental law of consciousness. The basic law is spiritual. Karma is a secondary machinery to help the consciousness to grow by experience.

It is quite possible to eliminate the Karmic force; it is not absolute.

KNOWLEDGE

When knowledge is fresh in us, then it is invincible; when it is old, it loses its virtue. This is because God moves always forward.

Shun the barren snares of an empty metaphysics and the dry dust of unfertile intellectuality. Only that knowledge is worth having which can be made use of for a living delight and put out into temperament, action, creation and being.

Become and live the knowledge thou hast; then is thy knowledge the living God within thee.

LEADERSHIP

Help men, but do not pauperise them of their energy; lead and instruct men, but see that their initiative and originality remain intact; take others into thyself, but give them in return the full godhead of their nature. He who can do this is the leader and the guru.

LOGIC

Logic is the worst enemy of truth, as self-righteousness is the worst enemy of virtue; for the one cannot see its own errors nor the other its own imperfections.

LOVE

Love is a fine flower, but unity of consciousness is the root.

Love God in thy opponent, even while thou strikest him; so shall neither have hell for his portion.

LOVE AND FORCE

When all is said, Love and Force together can save the world eventually, but not Love only or Force only.

MAN

The animal is Man disguised in a hairy skin and upon four legs; the worm is Man writhing and crawling towards the evolution of his Manhood. Even crude forms of Matter are Man in his inchoate body. All things are Man, the Purusha.

For what do we mean by Man? An uncreated and indestructible soul that has housed itself in a mind and body made of its own elements.

MAN AND MOMENT

Without the man the moment is a lost opportunity; without the moment the man is a force inoperative.

MEDICINE

It is not the medicine that cures so much as the patient's faith in the doctor and the medicine. Both are a clumsy substitute for the natural faith in one's own self-power which they have themselves destroyed.

MEMORY

Even the soles of our feet have got a memory of their own.

MEN AND CHRIST

Men are still in love with grief; when they see one who is too high for grief or joy, they curse him and cry, "O thou insensible!" Therefore, Christ still hangs on the cross in Jerusalem.

MEN AND SRI KRISHNA

Men are in love with sin; when they see one who is too high for vice or virtue, they curse him and cry, "O thou breaker of bonds; thou wicked and immoral one!" Therefore, Sri Krishna does not live as yet in Brindaban.

MIND AND BRAIN

The brain is not the centre of thinking. It is the mind that thinks, the brain only reacts to it. There is a parallelism between the movements of the brain and those of the higher mind. But the brain is only a communicating channel, it is a support for the higher activity.

MIRACLE

The supernatural is that the nature of which we have not attained or do not yet know, or the means of which we have not yet conquered. The common taste for miracles is the sign that man's ascent is not yet finished.

Great saints have performed miracles; greater saints have railed at them; the greatest have both railed at them and performed them.

NATIONALITY

Nationality is a stride of the progressive God Passing beyond the stage of the family; therefore the attachment to clan and tribe must weaken and perish before a nation can be born.

God's world advances step by step fulfilling the lesser unit before it seriously attempts the larger. Affirm free nationality first, if thou wouldst ever bring the world to be one nation.

NATURE

O son of Immortality, live not thou according to Nature, but according to God; and compel her also to live according to the deity within thee.

NEGATIVES

All disease is a menas towards some new joy of health, all evil and pain a tuning of Nature for some more intense bliss and good, all death an opening on widest immortality. Why and how this should be so, is God's secret which only the soul purified of egoism can penetrate.

NIRVANA

Nirvana, as I know it, is a necessary expeience in order to get rid of the nature-personality which is subject to ignorance. You cease to be the small individual ego in a vast world. You throw away that and become the One in Nirvana. Nirvana is a passage for passing into a condition in which your true individuality can be attained. That true individuality is not a small, narrow and limited self contained in the world, but is vast and infinite and can contain the world within itself; you can remain in the world and yet be above it.

NON-VIOLENCE

Respect human life as long as you can; but respect more the life of humanity.

OPINION

An opinion is neither true nor false, but only serviceable for life or unserviceable; for it is a creation of Time and with time it loses its effect and value. Rise thou above opinion and seek wisdom everlasting.

PAIN

Pain is the touch of our Mother teaching us how to bear and grow in rapture. She has three stages of her schooling, endurance first, next equality of soul, last ecstasy.

PAST

Break the moulds of the past, but keep safe its genius and its spirit, or else thou hast no future.

PHYSICAL WORLD

The entire physical world is made up of force; it is nothing else but the working of a certain consciousness and power.

POLITY

Democracy was the protest of the human soul against the allied despotism of autocrat, priest and noble; Socialism is the protest of the human soul against the despotism of a plutocratic democracy; Anarchism is likely to be the protest of the human soul against the tyranny of a bureaucratic Socialism.

POSSESSION BY BEINGS, THEIR AIM

Firstly to have influence on the physical plane which they can have by taking possession of a man. Secondly, to play a joke—just to see what happens. Thirdly, to play God and be worshipped. Fourthly, to bring about a manifestation of vital power. To this class belong those beings that effectuate miraculous cures and have great healing powers. Fifthly, to satisfy some desire or impulse like murder or lust.

POVERTY

The acceptance of poverty is noble and beneficial in a class or an individual, but it becomes fatal and pauperises life of its richness and expansion if it is perversely organised into a general or national ideal.

Athens, not Sparta, is the progressive type for mankind. Ancient India with its ideal of vast riches and vast spending was the greatest of nations. Modern India with its trend towards national asceticism has fully become poor in life and sunk into weakness and degradation.

PROPERTY

All property is theft.

PURUSHA PRAKRITI

The Purusha looks at the world as Prakriti, i.e. Nature, represents it to be. On the mental plane Prakriti represents thoughts, ideas—in short all mental movements. On the vital plane Prakriti represents itself as desires—in short, as action of the vital force. On the physical plane it represents, itself as the unchangeable law of physical life.

It is not the Purusha but the Prakriti which has to be made to aspire and made fit. The Purusha is silent, passive, looking at Prakriti.

REASON

Until Wisdom comes to thee, use the reason for its God given purposes and faith and instinct for theirs. Why shouldst thou set thy members to war upon each other?

REASON AND WISDOM

What men call knowledge is the reasoned acceptance of false appearance. Wisdom looks behind the veil and sees. Reason fixes details and contrasts them. Reason divides, Wisdom marries contrasts in a single harmony.

RELIGIONS

Each religion has helped mankind. Paganism increased in man the light of beauty, the largeness and heights of his life, his aim at a many-sided perfection; Christianity gave him some vision of divine love and charity; Buddhism has shown him a noble way to be wiser, gentler, purer; Judaism and Islam how to be religiously faithful in action and zealously devoted to God; Hinduisim has opened to him the largest and profoundest spiritual possibilities. A great thing would be done if all these God-visions could embrace and cast themselves into each other; but intellectual dogma and cult-egoism stand in the way.

RAMAKRISHNA-VIVEKANANDA

What was Ramakrishna? God manifest in a human being; but behind there is God in His infinite impersonality and His universal Personality.

And what was Vivekananda? A radiant glance from the eye of Shiva; but behind him is the divine gaze from which he came and Shiva himself and Brahma and Vishnu and Om all-exceeding.

RENUNCIATION

All renunciation is for a greater joy yet ungrasped. Some renounce for the joy of duty done, some for the joy of peace, some for the joy of God and some for the joy of self-torture, but renounce rather as a passage to the freedom and untroubled rapture beyond.

REVOLUTIONS

The world has had only half a dozen successful revolutions and most even of these were very like failures; yet it is by great and noble failures that humanity advances.

The world knows three kinds of revolutions. The material has strong results, the moral and intellectual are infinitely larger in their scope and richer in their fruits, but the spiritual are the great sowings.

SELFISHNESS

Meanness and selfishness are the only sins that I find it difficult to pardon! Yet they alone are almost universal. Therefore these also must not be hated in others, but in ourselves annihilated.

SELF-RIGHTEOUS

It is easy to distinguish the evil worked by sin and vice, but the trained eye sees also the evil done by self-righteous or self-regarding virtue.

SEX AND SADHANA

The sexual act involves a great loss of vital force, it is a movement towards death, though it is compensated by creation of new life.

The excitement accompanying the ordinary sexual act destroys the psychic possibilities of the man. He gets separated and dissociated from the higher centres of consciousness and goes downwards.

SHAKESPEARE

I find in Shakespeare a far greater and more consistent universalist than the Greeks. All his creations are universal types from Lancelot Gobbo and his dog up to Lear and Hamlet.

The Greeks sought universality by omitting all finer individual touches; Shakespeare sought it more successfully by universalising the rarest individual details of character.

SILENCE

All speech and action comes preaped out of the eternal Silence.

SIN

The sense of sin was necessary in order that man might become disgusted with his own imperfections. It was God's corrective for egoism. But man's egoism meets God's device by being very dully alive to its own sins and very keenly alive to the sins of others.

Sin and Virtue are a game of resistance we play with God in His efforts to draw us towards perfection. The sense of virtue helps us to cherish our sins in secret.

Sin is that which was once in its place, persisting now it is out of place; there is no other sinfulness.

SIN AND VIRTUE

The law of sin and virtue ceases for us when the sun of God shines upon the soul in truth and love with its unveiled splendour. Moses is replaced by Christ, the Shastra by the Veda.

SLEEP YOGIC

Ten minutes of yogic sleep are equal to hours of ordinary sleep.

SMALL AND BIG

There is nothing small in God's eyes; let there be nothing small in thine. He bestows as much labour of divine energy on the formation of a shell as on the building of an empire. For the self it is greater to be a good shoemaker than a luxurious and incompetent king.

SOLITUDE

The love of solitude is a sign of the disposition towards knowledge; but knowledge itself is only achieved when we have a settled perception of solitude in the crowd, in the battle and in the mart.

SPACE INNER

You feel when you go deep in meditation that there is an inner space, *cidakasa*, which extends to infinity, and our material space is only a result of it.

SPIRITISM

The will of the medium and of the men participating creates a force which brings about the manifestation. The answers generally are from the minds of men who are present. They come from the subconscious mind as also from the subliminal mind which knows many more things than men are aware of.

SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality must be the basis; otherwise your success will be your failure.

SUFFERING

Suffering is a sign of imperfection of nature. It is a stamp of imperfection on the individual and universal nature.

The soul is not here for suffering.

All this idea of suffering and self-immolation comes from the Asuric vital plane where suffering is the law of development and it is the Asuric influence that casts it on humanity.

Suffering is only a 'circumstance' of our evolution. There are planes where the element of suffering does not enter at all.

Distrust the man who has never failed and suffered; follow not his fortune, fight not under his banner.

SUPERMAN

Evolution is not finished; reason is not the last word nor the reasoning animal the supreme figure of Nature. As man emerged out of the animal, so out of man the superman emerges.

He who can rise above this matter-regarding broken mental human unit and possess himself universalised and deified in a divine force, a divine love and joy and a divine knowledge.

Nietzsche saw the superman as the lion-soul passing out of camelhood, but the true heraldic device and token of the superman is the lion seated upon the camel which stands upon the cow of plenty. If thou canst not be the slave of all mankind, thou art not fit to be its master, and if thou canst not make thy nature as Vasishtha's cow of plenty with all mankind to draw its wish from her udders, what avails thy leonine supermanhood?

Be to the world as the lion in fearlessness and lordship, as the camel in patience and service, as the cow in quiet, forbearing and maternal beneficence. Raven on all the joys of God as a lion over its prey, but bring also all humanity into that infinite field of luxurious ecstasy to wallow there and to pasture.

THOUGHT

The seat of thought is not the brain. The brain is only the communicating channel.

TIME AND SPACE

Time is consciousness in action working in Eternity and space is consciousness as being in self-extension.

One has to know space as the extension of being and time as an extension of energy.

TITAN

The Titans are stronger than the gods because they have agreed with God to front and bear the burden of His wrath and enmity; the gods were able to accept only the pleasant burden of His love and kindlier rapture.

TITANS AND GODS

The saint and the angel are not the only divinities; admire also the Titan and the Giant.

The old writings call the Titans the elder gods. So, they still are, nor is any god entirely divine unless there is hidden in him also a Titan.

If I cannot be Rama, then I would be Ravana, for he is the dark side of Vishnu.

TRAGEDIES

Poets make much of death and external afflictions, but the only tragedies are the soul's failures and the only epic man's triumphant ascent towards godhead.

TRINITY

The Indian trinity (Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva) refers to cosmic powers which preside over certain movements in the universe. 'Son' in the Christian Trinity means perhaps the 'Divine in man', 'Holy Ghost' symbolises the "Divine Consciousness."

TRUE

Only those thoughts are true the opposite of which is also true in its own time and application; indisputable dogmas are the most dangerous kind of falsehoods.

TRUTH DYNAMIC

God is infinite Possibility. Therefore Truth is never at rest, therefore also Error is justified of her children.

VOICES

Leap not too quickly at all voices, for there are lying spirits ready to deceive thee, but let thy heart be pure and afterwards listen.

WATCHES

Watches behave differently with different men. It is also certain they answer to man's thought and will.

WINE

Wine and narcotics generally inhibit the action of the most tamasic centres in the physical brain; and the other centres in the brain get stimulated. This helps one to escape from the limitations of the physical consciousness and one may get into other planes of consciousness.

WOMEN

The mediaeval ascetics hated women and thought they were created by God for the temptation of monks. One may be allowed to think more nobly both of God and of woman.

WORK

Work as if the ideal had to be fulfilled swiftly and in thy life time; persevere as if thou knewest it not to be unless purchased by a thousand years yet of labour.

WRITING

It is always very disappointing to read one's own writing. One feels how ignorant one was!

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Appendix

Dr. C. R. Reddy's Address

On the occasion of the presentation of the
SIR CATTAMANCHI RAMALINGA REDDY NATIONAL PRIZE

to

SRI AUROBINDO

at the Convocation held at the Andhra University

on December 11, 1948

Mr. Chancellor, our object in founding the National Prize was to bring about association between the members of the University and the inspiring personalities of contemporary India—they that make history and will live in history as permanent light that lead us through the encircling gloom. If that was our object, we have reached the summit of realization today by the kindly acceptance of the offering of ours by Sri Aurobindo. We are not awarding; we are making an offering. If it is due to the eminent merit in Humanities of Sri Aurobindo that we are paying him this tribute, his acceptance of it is the climax of the good fortune of the Andhra University and its blessing.

In all humility of devotion, I hail Sri Aurobindo as the sole sufficient genius of the age. He is more than the hero of a nation. He is amongst the Saviours of humanity, who belong to all ages and all nations, the *Sanatanas*, who leaven our existence with their eternal presence, whether we are aware of it or not.

The Rishi tradition is the most glorious and priceless feature of Hindu culture. Its origin is lost in mystic antiquity, but its flow has never ceased. It will continue its sublime course till it mingles itself with eternity. We had Rishis in the Vedic era. And then a succession of Seers, of whom Gautama Siddhartha, the fairest flower and fulfilment of humanity, towers to the highest heaven, and the Sages of the Upanishads, Mahavira, Nanak, Ramadas, the inspirer of Shivaji, and in our own times, Dayananda Saraswati, Ramakrishna Parmahansa, Ramana Maharshi, and he to whom we are today offering our National Prize, Sri Aurobindo.

A great Frenchman has hailed Sri Aurobindo as the last of our

Rishis. Really, he is the most recent, for in this world of death and sorrow, Rishis are an undying race of bliss. And they pulsate every now and again with far-flashing revelation like those wonderful stars which astronomers call the Light-houses of the Celestial Regions.

Sri Aurobindo excels in the range and compass of his genius. He is poet, dramatist, Philosopher, critic, interpreter and commentator of the Vedas, the Gita and all the transcendent lore and legend of India, and he is something higher than these, the Saint who has realized his oneness with the Universal Spirit, and has fathomed the depths and brought up treasures of supreme value and brilliance. But these many aspects of Sri Aurobindo possess an organic unity of thought, impulse and purpose. They all reflect in their several phases the light of eternity that is in him.

I am not going to narrate the life of Sri Aurobindo, as chronologically lived. Our Professor, Mr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar's splendid biography of Sri Aurobindo is there for all to read. A book written in a style of superlative charm and power, and one which could without exaggeration be regarded as a masterpiece in English literature. Perhaps I may recall by way of pardonable vanity and the petty desire to shine in Sri Aurobindo's reflected light, that we are both Cambridge men, he very much my senior, and that I succeeded him as the Vice-Principal of the Baroda College. I had the honour of knowing him, though scantily, in his Purva-Ashrama. We had a number of friends in common. Mr. A. B. Clark, the Principal of the Baroda College, remarked to me, "So you met Aurobindo Ghosh. Did you notice his eyes? There is mystic fire and light in them. They penetrate into the beyond." And he added, "If Joan of Arc heard heavenly voices, Aurobindo probably sees heavenly visions." Clark was a materialist of materialists. I have never been able to understand how that worldly but delightful person could have glimpsed the truth, then latent, about Aurobindo. But, then, does not the lightning flash, which lasts but a moment, leap forth from the dark black bosom of the cloud? The Alipore Jail, where he was consigned to solitude and meditation for a year, marks a turning point in Sri Aurobindo's career. The British Government had bound his body and liberated his soul. They did not mean it, but the best things that we do are not infrequently, done unwittingly, spontaneously. Body enslaved, soul set free, that was the paradox of his incarceration. It was there that his first mystic experiences and direct perception of the Eternal Truths, which according to our Sphota theory are ever present, floating as it were in the space

that envelops the Universe, occurred. Beginning to realise himself he retired to Pondicherry in 1910. Can a Rishi ever retire? He may retire in body; very often the retirement of the body is the prelude to the soul ascending the heights of heaven and ranging over the entire globe. His physical being is in Pondicherry; but his influence, can we set limits to it in space or in time? His Ashram, one of the beacon-lights of the world, attracts the devout and the serious-minded without distinction of race and country. Judged by temporal standards he is seventy-six year old, but really time cannot touch him, nor earth and its impurities. His soul is like a star and dwells apart.

In Sri Aurobindo, literature, metaphysics, and the Sadhana of realization, are a spiral ascending from Earth to Heaven in mutual support and unison. In the superb summary of Mr. K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar, "The Seer had fronted reality; the Poet has hymned his 'Gloried Fields of Trance'; the Philosopher has sought to interpret the vision in terms of reason; the Yogi has formulated a method, a multiform technique, for achieving the desired change in consciousness; the sociologist has thrown out significant hints in regard to the organisation of tomorrow's world; and the reactive critic has sensed the rhythms of the 'future poetry' and described how the 'new' poet will ride on the wings of an elemental spirituality and articulate the ineluctable rhythms of the Spirit."

As a poet Sri Aurobindo ranks high. In that most difficult of all forms of prosody, the Blank Verse, which under in artistic hands has a fatal tendency to become prose, he has a place all his own, which is among the highest. *Urvashi and Love and Death, and Savitri: a legend and a Symbol*, are in charm and beauty without a parallel in English literature. *Ahana* and *Ilion* are masterpieces in Hexameter, a classical metre difficult to transplant in modern soils, *Savitri* is rising and growing, and has not yet reached the full flush of her grace and beauty, and when it does, it will have given a new colouring, a new life and attraction to the immortal legend of the *Mahabharata*.

In many of his works of criticism, interpretations of the Veda and the Gita, he has combined vast research with the intuition of a poet, the reflection of a philosopher and the vision of a Rishi. He has a sentence that will serve to inspire the United Nations Organisation and

give it spiritual ground and hope—"Evolution moves through diversity from a simple to a complex oneness. Unity the race moves towards, and must one day realise." It is a fine phrase "complex oneness" and a far-reaching ray of hope and comfort, though today we are all overwhelmed by the complexity and do not seem to be nearing oneness except under the devastating might of the atom bomb.

Sri Aurobindo's faith in the sure but slow evolution of human unity in harmonious diversity is too robust to be dwarfed or defeated by hard, stubborn facts. Rather it is a faith that is out to conquer fact and remould it nearer to the heart's desire. He is of the race of prophets who see the present as but a transitory moment that should not be allowed to overcome the optimism of man.

It is not as a man of letters or of philosophy that Sri Aurobindo reaches his unique eminence; but it is as a Yogi who has caught the Light and reflects it in blissful abundance. He is the Prophet of the Life Divine. To him it is an experience and not mere idea. This experience could be shared by others. The nature of his spiritual quest, which led to his great conquest, he thus described in a letter to C. R. Das who defended him in the Alipore trial—"I see more and more manifestly that man cannot get out of the futile cycle the race is always treading, until he has raised himself to a new foundation. How could our present instruments, intellect, life, mind, body, be made true and perfect channels for this great transformation? This was the problem I have been trying to work out in my own experience and I have now a sure basis, a wide knowledge, and some mastery of the secret."

He presents his gospel in a book that is a landmark in the history of human thought and aspiration, *The Life Divine*, which Sir Francis Younglhusband has acclaimed as the "greatest book published in my generation." Pythagoras spoke of the Music of the Heavens. Here is the Music of Humanity, no longer still sad, ascending to heaven. Sri Aurobindo believes that we shall evolve into higher stage of being; and this evolution will enable us to overcome the limitations and miseries of our present existence and lead us to a world whose course is equable and pure—a life of harmony and bliss. This process of evolution is actual. It is operating steadily here and now, and will not stop short of fulfilling itself. In due course, Man will attain the New Life, in which pains and

sorrows will have no existence and death no sting.

Sri Aurobindo relieves our despair by the certainty of this advent. In the world of death, he, immortal, gives us the assurance of immortality. The world has need of Thee, Sri Aurobindo, and that is why thou art with us still.

Mr. Chancellor, I now request you, on behalf of the Andhra University, to be so good as to make the offering of this National Prize, with which it is my unmerited good fortune to have my name linked, *in absentia*, to Sri Aurobindo. I doubt though, if the term, *in absentia*, is properly applicable. For though Sri Aurobindo leads a life of rigorous seclusion rarely seeing people or being seen by people, yet thousands of devotees in all parts of the world feel him as a real presence. He is not of the earth and does not mix with the earth, but like heaven envelops us all. So Mr. Chancellor, honour the University, and if you don't think it impertinent of me to say so, honour yourself by awarding the Sir Cattamanchi Ramalinga Reddy National Prize to Sri Aurobindo.

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Chronology

(1872-1950)

- 1872 August 15 : Born in Calcutta.
- 1879-1893 : Education
- 1879 : Was taken to England alongwith his brothers.
- 1884 September : Admitted to St. Paul's School and remained till December 1889.
- 1891 : Wrote a poem on Parnell, the Irish leader.
- 1893 January (Early) : Sailed on S. S. Carthage for coming to India.
- 1893 February 6 : Arrived in Bombay from abroad.
- 1893 February 8 : Joined service in the Survey Settlement of the State Government in Baroda.
- 1893-1907 : Service in Baroda.
- 1893 : His political activity in India began with his articles in the Induprakash of Bombay, exposing the futility of the then Congress aims and methods.
- 1893 August 7 : In an article he spoke of the high expectations raised by the vociferous protagonists of the Congress and the actualities of the situations.
- 1894 : Visited Bengal for the first time after his return from England.
- 1894 March 6 : Wrote an article.
- 1894 July 6 to August 27 : Wrote a series of seven studies entitled "Bankim Chandra Chatterjee by a Bengalee" in the Induprakash.
- 1894 August 25 : Wrote a letter to his sister

- 1895 : Was specially called to Ootacamund to prepare summary of the famous Bapat case.
- 1896 : Wrote a narrative poem, *Urvasie*.
- 1897 : Even as he was working in the Government Department, his services were lent to the Baroda College for teaching French for certain periods in a week.
- 1898 : Was appointed acting Professor of English when Professor Littledale went on leave in the Baroda College.
- 1899 July 22 : An address at the annual social gathering of the Baroda College.
- 1899 : Wrote narrative poem. *Love and Death*.
- 1900 : Permanent Professor of English in Baroda College.
- 1901 April : Married Mrinalini Devi.
- 1902 to 1910 : Was in the political field.
- 1902 : The first Calcutta organisation was started, under his direction.
- 1902 : Visited Midnapur and met Hemchandra Das.
- 1902 : Paid a visit to Central India where he met some of the officers and men of regiments of Indian Army.
- 1902 December : Met Tilak at Ahmedabad Congress session.
- 1903 : Had darshan (audience) of Swami Brahmananda of Karnali near Chandod.
- 1903 February : Went to Calcutta on month's leave mainly to resolve the differences between Jatin and Barin.
- 1903 May : Visit to Kashmir with the Maharaja of Baroda.

- 1903 (Summer) : His return from leave in Bengal.
- 1904 : Started doing Yoga.
- 1905 : Rose to be the Vice-Principal of the Baroda College.
- 1905 March to 1906 February : Acted as the Principal of the Baroda College in the absence of Principal Tait.
- 1905 August 30 : Wrote a long letter to his wife Mrinalini Devi.
- 1905 September : Attended a meeting to protest against the proposed partition of Bengal.
- 1905 December : Attended the Banaras Session of the Congress.
- 1906 : On the eve of the Calcutta Congress, he was the first to openly declare 'complete autonomy free from British Control' as the country's aim and to organise the Nationalist Party with Bal Gangadhar Tilak.
- 1906 : Visited Chandod after Brahmanada's passing away and met his successor.
- 1906 February 19 : Took privilege leave in order to participate in the agitation in Bengal.
- 1906 April 14 : Attended the Barisal Conference of the Bengal Provincial Congress.
- 1906 June : Returned to Baroda.
- 1906 June 8 : Letter to his father-in-law.
- 1906 July : Arrived in Calcutta.
- 1906 August 14 : Joined as Principal of the Bengal National College.
- 1907 (Early) : Told his youngest brother Barindra to organise a revolutionary centre in their Maniktala Garden in Calcutta.
- 1907 April : Wrote in the *Bande Mataram* a series of articles on Passive Resistance.

- 1907 June 18 : Resigned from Baroda State Service.
- 1907 June 30 to October 13 : Serialised his play Perseus the Deliverer in the Bande Mataram.
- 1907 August : Was arrested for having published certain articles in the Bande Mataram.
- 1907 December 6 : Wrote a letter to his wife Mrinalini Devi.
- 1907 December 22 : On his way to Surat Congress, broke his journey and addressed a public meeting at Nagpur.
- 1908 January (first-week) : First met Lele. While meditating according to the guidance of the Maharashtrian Yogi Lele, he had the realisation of the silent Brahman and a complete stillness of mind.
- 1908 February : Returned to Calcutta.
- 1908 February 17 : Wrote a letter to his wife Mrinalini Devi.
- 1908 April 1 : Wrote in Bande Mataram "The position of India makes her the key of Asia."
- 1908 May 2 : Arrested alongwith 41 other revolutionaries in connection with the Bomb case.
- 1908 May 5 : Prison life at Alipore began.
- 1909 May 6 : Acquitted.
- 1909 May : After his acquital, he started writing on the significance of Indian nationalism.
- 1909 May 14 : Wrote a letter to the Editor of the Bengalee.
- 1909 May 30 : Delivered the inspired speech at Uttarpara that made history.
- 1909 June 19 : Started a Weekly Karmayogin.
- 1909 June 23 : Speech at Jhalakati.
- 1909 July 31 : 'An Open Letter to My Countrymen' published in the Karmayogin.
- 1909 August 23 : Started a Bengali weekly Dharma.

- 1909 October 18 : Durga-Stotra appeared in Dharma issue.
- 1910 February : Received information that the Karmayogin office would be searched and the next day he would be arrested.
- 1910 February : Left for Chandernagore.
- 1910 April 4 : After staying in Chandernagore for a while, he left for Pondicherry by a French Boat, under an assumed name, and landed there.
- 1910 October : Moved to a house in Rue Suffren. Lived there till April 1911.
- 1911 April : Moved to another house belonging to Raghava Chetty in Rue St. Louis.
- 1914 : Interviewed by the correspondent of The Hindu.
- 1914 August : When the first World War broke out, jointly with Paul and Medame Richard, he started the monthly philosophical review, the Arya.
- 1918 December : Interview given to A. B. Purani.
- 1918 December 17 : His wife Mrinalini Devi died.
- 1920 January 5 : Letter to Joseph Baptista.
- 1920 April 7 : Letter to his brother Barin.
- 1920 August 30 : Letter to Dr. B. S. Munje.
- 1922 September : Left the residence in Rue Francois Martin and moved to Rue de la Marine.
- 1922 November 28 : Letter to C. R. Das.
- 1924 January 24 : Interview given to Dilip Kumar Roy.
- 1925 January 5 : Lala Lajpat Rai met him.
- 1925 August 25 : Made some important statements.
- 1925 November 19 : Made a few interesting remarks about his biography.
- 1925 December 9 : A talk.
- 1926 May 18 : A talk.

- 1926 July 10 : An unusual recollection.
- 1926 November 24 : The day of his Sidhi realisation of the Krishna consciousness. (Retired into seclusion).
Came to be known as Sri Aurobindo.
- 1928 May 29 : Broke his seclusion and met Rabindranath Tagore. Rabindranath Tagore visited him.
- 1929 February 8 : Shifted to another building close by on Rue Francois Martin.
- 1947 August 15 : When India became free, he took this coincidence with his birthday not as a fortuitous accident, but as the sanction and seal of the Divine Force which guides 'my steps on the work with which, I began life' (Sri Aurobindo).
- 1948 December 11 : The Andhra University presented the Sir Cattamanchi Ramalinga Reddy National Prize to him.
- 1950 December 5 : Entered into Mahasamadhi.

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